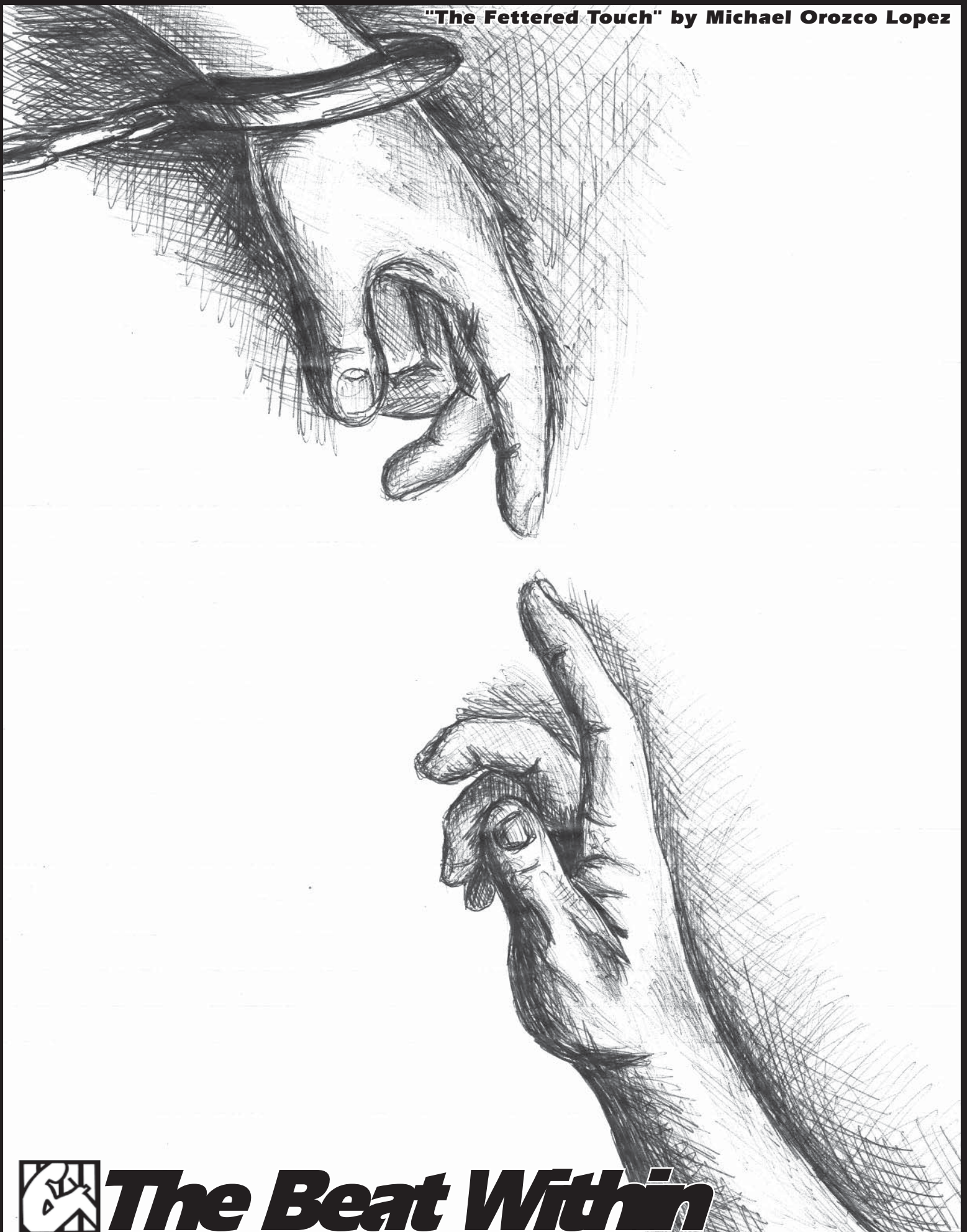


"The Fettered Touch" by Michael Orozco Lopez



The Beat Within

The Beat Within // Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside // Volume 11.13/14



Brace yourself Beat loyalist, this is our phattest issue to date, literally, a big bad double issue (11.13 and 11.14) to absorb. Yes indeed we hit the damn near century mark in pages, but given many of us were on vacation last week this is our way to make up for last week's no Beat. To make this issue a reality a number of colleagues truly stepped up, and this editor, who was also on vacation thanks them from the heart. This week, we resume with our guest editor's note writers, and this writer is truly one of our favorite people, our wonderful colleague and friend Danielle Worthy. So given we are very tight on space, lets pass the keyboard onto Danielle to tell her story!

I remember the first time I heard about The Beat Within. I had just started working at Pacific News Service, its parent organization, and thought, "That sounds like something I want to be a part of." It used writing as a means for young people to tell each other and the rest of the world what they thought was important. It was clear from the start that in order to earn the respect of the young people in the halls and the other Beat staffers consistency was essential. Having moved here from St. Louis, Missouri and just starting a new job at a place where I was actually excited to be, I knew that then was not the time.

So I waited and worked and settled in. More than a year passed between the time I expressed an interest in the program and the time that I walked into Alameda County Juvenile Hall.

I cannot explain how nervous I was that first trip. My stomach was flip flopping the entire car ride from San Francisco to San Leandro. In addition to my enormous fear of speaking in front of large groups, I was also worried the young people would write me off as some proper square that couldn't possibly have anything worthwhile to say. And it's true I am proper, hell I went to private school all of my life, and I can be a little bit of a square - growing up I spent a lot of my time with my mom who was a product of the 1950s.

Yet as an African American woman that grew up in North St. Louis, the economically deprived predominantly black part of town, I thought maybe I could save a few souls. After all, my dad taught black history, one of first programs of its kind back in the day, and my mom taught in East St. Louis, working with kids whose lives so closely resembled the ones I was about to meet they could almost be interchangeable. And I am a good listener, have been since I was a kid, so I thought I can do this, right?

My first unit was with the young women of Unit 2, who always make me laugh, especially at myself. God knows those first couple of months I needed it 'cause I was taking myself way too seriously. I thought I was going to walk in, spit off a couple of sentences laced with so much wisdom the girls would be running for the door to start their new life. Was I naive? Absolutely.

Then it was off to what I fondly refer to as the "little guys" unit, which is now Unit 1. It's not that these boys were little in size (some are) but when you walk into the room all you see are children. No matter what they have done or what they say, all I see is the eyes and minds of little boys and teens, which is how it is supposed to be because we are talking about 11-14-year olds.

Going to the older boys, Unit C, was a different story and was/is my biggest challenge. There are times when I look around and see the faces of teenagers but more often I see the lost eyes of grown men who have seen and done too much.

I realized that I shouldn't have been nervous about the kids - it was me I should have been worried about. Some of the kids definitely gave me a hard time for being proper, which I didn't mind, but that wasn't what was stopping me from connecting with them initially.

Floating in a sea of largely black and brown faces, I got upset. Look at what we are doing to ourselves. Look at what they have convinced us our lives are worth. Look at how we have bought into the hype and totally lost sight of what's really important. Enter Danielle's soap box, which I readily climbed on top of to talk about unity. "We have to stick together because no one is going to take care of us but us," and pursuit of education, "You need to stop worrying about all this bull shit and get back to school, maybe go to college and make something out of your life."

No one was listening though. Looking back I see it was the way I came at them and my aggrandized view of myself but at the time I didn't get why they weren't responding. I was hurt.

I tried to talk about the power of writing and usually got snickers. As I mentioned before, my dad was a high school history teacher and my best friend. He was also an alcoholic and by the time I hit 8-years old he wasn't the same man. Three years later, he and my brother, who was 17 at the time, got into a huge fight. And when I say fight it wasn't just about yelling, that kind of thing happened all the time in my house, I am talking about fists swinging. As my brother held my dad down by his collar on our living room table, a table filled with pictures of us looking like a happy family, I heard my brother yell out, "Look at you, you're so drunk you can't even fight back. You're a bum!"

I will spare you the rest of the details but the fight ended with my dad grabbing a butcher knife, my mom holding him back and my brother running down the hall toward me.

The point of this was not so much to talk about my childhood but to tell how writing helped me. We had an assignment in school to create our own books that would be written and illustrated by us. I decided to make my book about that night with my dad. At a wealthy, exclusive private grade school, I thought the people in my class didn't have problems like me. So in addition to being scared about what was happening to my family, I was also embarrassed.

I wrote the story anyway, drew my pictures and something happened. Little by little I started to feel better. It felt good to get out my feelings and thoughts on something that was pretty hard to talk about. Once our books were bound, they were displayed in the back of the room so we could see what the other had been working on. A lot of people told me how much they liked my story. One kid even confessed to me that his dad had a drinking problem and could be a real jackass when he was drunk.

Now when I lay out the story like this it sounds very trite. But at the time, having folks take a tiny glimpse into what I was going through meant the world to me. Even having someone I didn't know very well be able to relate to my experience on the tiniest level made me feel like I wasn't such a freak. So from then on out, I used writing as a way to get it all out and it helped me get through some pretty rough times over the years.

So fast-forward to my times in the hall. Now I never used this story as an example of why I thought writing was so important but I brought that passion with me to the halls. I saw and heard things that I couldn't believe were happening to anyone, let alone to people who were so young. I wanted these young people to think of writing as a sort of therapy, as a way to let the world know what they were going through and maybe to show one another that no one is alone in this struggle called life.

I listened to the girls talk about their men, their gangs, their pimps, their fragmented families and my heart broke. Their words held so much power and emotion, there were days they practically knocked the wind out of me.

But I also saw a raw energy in their pieces, a pain and love that made a heart beat seem palpable. I heard about parties, their favorite songs and the little brothers and sisters they couldn't wait to get back to.

I watched some those tiny little boys turning into the confused, bitter men I would sometimes see in C-Unit, talking about fights, defending siblings and parents, entering the game for survival and being wooed by the big payoff, never fully understanding that losing freedom and friends might be a sign that this is not how things should be.

But they could be so silly and fun their energy is infectious. They would take a child-like pride in their detailed drawings and offer up writing that was filled

with so much honesty you knew it was a young person writing. It's refreshing and endearing. When they look up at you with those wide eyes and goofy grins, you can't help but adore them.

Then there are the boys in C Unit, skilled lyricists and poetic prophets, who are always dropping knowledge and making me take a step back to think. These young men have been in the game long enough to know that how it plays out in the end but don't care.

But some are very ready and very serious about changing their lives. Some are fathers whose number one priority is their child. Some are supporting their whole families. I got to read about their favorite memories, the person who has influenced the most in a positive way and what they see the future holding for them - usually a nice job, a house, a wife and some kids, the life we all hope to have.

There are days when I am typing up a piece and am stopped dead in my tracks because it seems so unfair that a person so young would have to deal with so much. There are days when I come home from workshops with a big smile on my face thinking that so and so is getting out and is finally getting that second chance. There are times when I am talking with someone and just want to shower her/him with the love it seems like he/she has been missing.

There are times when I wish I didn't know these things. What I mean is there are people functioning all over this planet who don't have a clue about death, drugs and destruction. And they are lucky. There are days I envy their ignorance because the world seems like such a cold place when a child can't get the things he/she needs, the things so many of us took for granted.

Even though I don't want to know about it, I have to remember these young people are living it, everyday, win or lose, whether they like it or not.

I hope this doesn't make the halls sound like some wretched, gut-wrenchingly depressing place. I see so much beauty in the quality of some of their work, be it drawings or writing. I love to hear the boys and girls read/perform their pieces and really enjoy the one-on-one discussions that can bring to light a position or idea I had never even thought of. No matter how I feel at 6:30 before workshops start by 9:00 when things are wrapping up I am sad to see the night over.

What I have learned in the halls is that there are no clear answers and there is no one person that is going to change the world by lecturing and talking at people instead of with them. You cannot walk in, spend an hour with someone and expect to erase the 15 years that preceded your talk. But little things like a compliment, "Great piece last week," or "That was interesting what you said during discussion," can make big difference, bigger than I thought. Acknowledgement is the key. It is the most basic of human needs but you cannot survive without it.

The halls became less about the color of the who and more about the age; it became less about me changing the world, pretending I had all the answers (college is not everybody), and more about what can I do to help. These young men and women are being shuffled in and out of the system without the thing they need most - real acknowledgment for who they are and what they have to offer. These are our future writers, counselors, musicians, teachers, community leaders, parents and more. They can do anything, they just need a little reminder.

At his farewell dinner, one Beat facilitator said the young people at the halls had taught him more than he could ever teach them. I didn't get that when he said it but now I understand. The young people at Alameda County Juvenile Hall have taught me so much about myself and in a lot of ways I feel as though they are getting cheated because I get so much from our time together. I am a better person for having been a part of The Beat and am eternally grateful for the opportunity to work with so many amazing, talented young men and women.

Wow, what a moving story and what an honor to work with such a beautiful colleague and friend. Thanks Danielle!

Now for the two weeks of topics that were addressed prior to the writing in this issue were for 11.13, "Fair Trade" - There are times in our life where we have lost something dear to us; it might be a dear childhood teddy bear, or a Hot Wheel car, a toy, or maybe someone close to us. Now tell us know what is one thing you would give up to get back. We want to know what you would give up to bring that one person back or to have that one thing you have lost. Tell us why you want that one thing/person back and tell us what/why you are willing to trade for. Most of you have lost your freedom. Well, what is one thing you would give up to get your freedom back? The lifestyle you lived? The fast money? The drugs? What? Please tell us in details and just don't say I will give this up for this, we want to know why and we want you to elaborate on it.

Secondly, "What Drew You To Crime?" - Everyone has reasons for committing crimes. It might be the way you were raised, or because you needed money, or the influence of friends and/or family. Or maybe you just lose control of yourself sometimes. Why do you think you were drawn to the life you lead? Are you planning to stop committing crimes? Why? Or, are you planning to continue? Why? So explain why you commit crimes and whether or not you plan to change.

Last, "What Is Your Problem?"

And for 11.14, "Have you ever been a victim?" - We are used to reading pieces in The Beat that talk about crimes you have committed. Sometimes those crimes are gang related. Sometimes they have to do with selling drugs. Sometimes they describe taking someone else's property, jacking people, fighting and even using potentially deadly weapons against others. Sometimes, we feel a certain pride you seem to have when you describe victimizing someone (which might make it harder to talk about you being victimized).

What The Beat wants to know is, have you ever been the victim? There are many ways to think about this question. For example, some people are victimized by their own families. Sometimes alcohol or drug abuse leads to violence against children. Some children are victims of sexual molestation. And if you live the street life, then maybe someone else has put a gun to your head and jacked you for your shoes, your shirt or your property. Tell us of an event or occasion where you were the victim, where the crime that was committed was against you. Be as specific as you can. Tell us what happened, how you felt, where you were, and what you did afterwards.

Next is, "If You Could Start Over" - If you could wake up tomorrow and start your life fresh - no record of incarceration, no enemies, no mess from your past to live down - how would you start your life over? Would you take advantage of the lessons you've learned to be slicker at what you do, or would those lessons lead you to walk an entirely different path? What would you do the same as now, or would you change the way you're living? Would you try to make your mother proud by avoiding the streets? Would you put more energy and focus into getting a decent education? Would you try to avoid trouble? If you could wipe the slate clean, what new goals would you set for yourself, and how would go about achieving them?

Last but not least, "Describe this in detail: What brightens your spirit?"

Given we are so tight on space, allow us to direct you to this week's POW winners on page 4 - 11.

Don't forget our 15th ed. note writing contest topic, which is, "Turning Back the Hands Of Time." Tell us if you could turn back the hands of time would you? How far back would you go? What would you change? How would your life have turned out differently? Sure you could also tell us that you would not turn the hands back, but tell us why is that? Turning back the hands of time is a phrase we have heard time and time again, so tell us your take on it. Share your story, share your thoughts. If you had such power to rid the pains that have brought you to such a place would you turn the hands of time back?

Like we said, this contest is open to all Beat writers. All submissions need to be in by May 1, 2006.

OK, three thousand words later, allow us to get out of here! This issue goes out to those very dedicated colleagues who put forth the work in making this Beat a reality this week. Thank you Beat!

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at

www.thebeatwithin.org

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Counselors Corner

From The Beat: Every week before we leave Alameda County Juvenile Hall, Ms. Henry makes sure that she gets her copy of The Beat Within. This week, Ms. Henry gives back, sharing some beautiful words to her daughter.

Card To My Daughter

Daughter,
I wanted you
Loved you
And dreamed of you
Long before you were even born
That was a lot of expectation
To put on a child
But leave it to you
To always be your own person
To have your own mind
To do things your way...
Makes me want to yell
"Look world, look at my daughter!
"Isn't she amazing?"
You are my legacy
And it makes me proud to know
I've made the world a better place
Simply by having you.

With all my love, Mama.

-Ms. Henry, 150 Crew Counselor

Latinos And Latinas

Have you ever regretted anything in your life? Of course you have. I bet you regret sitting in your cell or should I say your so-called room. As for me, I'm a Latina from "San Jo" and I sure do regret meeting the messed up system in Alameda County.

Well anyways, my point of writing to all Latinos and Latinas is to ask you so-called "Gang Bangers" what do you get out of fighting over a color and number? I'm just curious because, I mean we're all Latinos, right? Whatever we claim, we are all familia. I mean I ain't gonna lie. I have gang members in my familia, but they're either young and dumb or are too old to realize how ignorant that stuff really is. To me it's funny 'cause I get along with anyone, unless you disrespect.

Well as for me, I say gangs are all ignorance, and to all my Latinos and Latinas, stay away from that stupid stuff. It's dumb and I bet later in life when you're all older and mature you will realize that it's all just a waste of time. Instead you should have been going to school to make something out of yourself. And to all you youngsters that are just beginning the wannabe life, believe it or not you will regret even thinking about this nonsense like gangs.

This stuff is old and done with... no one gang bangs any more. It's all outdated, believe me. We have wannabes now. There's the wannabes from Mexico trying to bang and they don't even know what the word "sur" stands for. And then we have the other gang beating anyone who has the "other color" on. For what? It's a color. I wear it too and I don't bang, but I'm Latina. What, are you guys gonna attack anyone who has a particular color on? From my understanding it isn't a law that we can't wear any color we want. And yes, it is a free world. We can all wear what we want.

So, now is the time to think with your heads and not your asses. We all need to get along 'cause this world is all messed up and is now coming to an end. So we as familia should put a stop to this nonsense and make a difference in this new generation. So, to all my Latinos and Latinas, take some time and think about this. It's serious. My love goes out to all. Peace...

-LO, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We've never heard a better call for unity. Often we forget that behind the colored clothes connecting us to a neighborhood or a gang, we have so much more in common as Latinas and Latinos — and we are all human beings. How are the young ever going to learn that killing someone else's child (for everyone of us has a mother) is a direct threat to our own community and our humanity? We hope some young person who thinks with his or her head takes the time to take your words to heart. Unless we start living the way you recommend, we don't see how we can survive. We don't know how you got so smart, but we're grateful that you did!

I Am A Woman

I am a beautiful woman
May have pimples on my skin
But my glow is from within.
In my mind I'm a goddess.

I'm not afraid to stand up for myself no matter the consequences.

I am a woman who has walked through her past and healed into the present.

I am a woman that other women envy.

I am a woman who has dignity and pride.

I am a woman who honors her experience and tells her story, Who refuses to carry sins within her body and life.

I am a woman who trusts and respects herself.

I am a woman that authors her own life.

I am a woman who exerts, initiates and moves on her own behalf.

I am a woman in love with my own body.

A woman who believes my body is enough, just as it is.

I am a woman who is reminded of the truth about myself when I forget.

I am a woman who is proud to be from where I'm from.

I am a woman who knows what I stand for.

I am a woman who makes my own calls.

I am an independent woman.

I am an individual, strong, lovable, kind, known and respected woman.

You can be the same.

This piece was inspired by my loved one!

Always,

-Bianca, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There is something very special about being a woman, huh? You sound as if you have a lot to be proud of. Many times people try to reduce women to being just bodies — how to be prettier and thinner or sexier. What we love about your piece is the way that you show the beauty of womanhood in all of its many dimensions. We don't choose the bodies that our souls will be housed in, but we do choose how we respect it. Thank you for this piece. It is needed.

My Plan

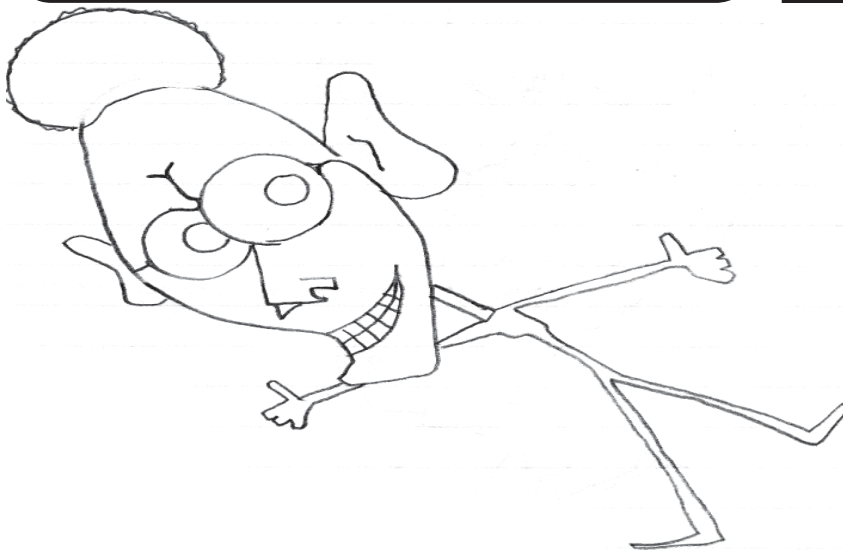
When I get out of jail this time, I'm'a go to college and play football. Jail, YA, and these rooms in Alameda County Juvenile Hall ain't cool at all.

I got a family to go home to, instead of staying on these streets looking lost. Some people ain't got nothing. I hope and pray for the poor to get better and to get a job instead of looking in the trash for nothing. I'm'a go to YA and do my time fast, then try to get a job working for a plumber — and play football. I got little brothers to look after and to make sure they don't follow in my footsteps.

When I get out and see my friends and they ask me, "Let's go rob somebody to get some money!" I'm'a say, "I'm cool. I don't like jail. I love my freedom. If you want to, go ahead, you can, but I'm not. I'm not gonna let jail take me away. I'm'a help take care of my family like a man should, and I'm'a make my mom happy so she don't got to worry no more."

-Lil' Ant, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Be ready when your friends tell you that you won't get caught, so you won't go back to jail. To prove it, they'll tell you about all the licks they've been hitting and how they don't get caught. They will even believe it when they tell you that it's safe. But you know that it's just like an addiction. You can't do that first crime, or pretty soon you'll be back to doing crime any old time — until you do get caught or shot or both. Make your money legit, just as you say, so your mom won't have to miss you the way she will while you're away at CYA. You've got a good plan, now don't let the next man turn you around.



Misguided By My Thoughts

i am being confined and misguided
 by my thoughts
 traveled the wrong direction
 and ambitions over i catapult
 i have brought myself down
 for yet i have did what they wanted me to do
 an eye for an eye and yet a tooth for a tooth
 behavior is in clear vision
 and my own decisions i only wish to edit
 misguided once too many
 and for my actions i have lost instead of gained credits
 hide-bound — meaning unwilling to change
 and narrow-minded
 (and if and is) there is peace
 seek through the bad and help me wish to find it
 i am being confined and misguided
 by my unacceptable thoughts
 when i don't know but i have to prepare
 make these thoughts leave at any intellectual cost
 standing at the middle of center stage
 leaving critics to critique
 words from a wise man
 and left in unrecited lyrics
 misguided somehow
 but directions i have to prepare
 what kind of foolish man would i be
 if i said i did not care
 myself is the one whom i have betrayed
 clashing through myself
 to knock down my own barricades
 i have been deceiving myself
 and misguided by my cruel thoughts
 to proclaim my victory
 only to find out i have only failed and truly lost
 i have brought myself down
 in every and any cruel and selfish way
 to learn to hurt one's self
 in the same way to betray
 will i seek and learn
 huh one way or another
 to be left alive or
 dead by the side of the gutter
 or in heaven's skies only to hover
 overcome my misguided and devilish thoughts

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your learning curve is steep, at least when it comes to writing words profound and deep. Your talent is matched only by your ambition, to use poetry as a microscope of the soul and root out your own diseased disposition to crime, tricked as you say by your own misguiding mind. The devil took your desire and by the light and heat of that fire made you blind to reality, had you trading a minute of shine for the dark thoughts of a prisoner-doing-time's mentality. And yet in the darkness is where you've found your way, for when your eyes go blind by the lies of your mind, it is time for your heart to have its say and for truth to have its day. Yeah, you were misguided by sin; now it's time to switch from the losing side and start to win. In the confusion and despair of your confession to betraying yourself, you've learned the first and hardest lesson of how low you have to go before you're willing to change direction — and marry spiritual health to material wealth. Then with patience, your life will become one long paid vacation from crime or ever having to be locked up doing time.

**If women ran the world
 The world would be a
 better place.**

Me And You

me and you, my soul mate, my pride, my hurt
 i love you through, and keep distance from those who
 throw dirt
 my peace, my soul, my heart, my flesh
 my future, my past, my soft heart buried deep in my chest
 my being, my life, my tears, to be comfort'
 my glory, my praise, the one to heal my puncture
 me and you, to have and to hold
 my life, my reasons for living, for you to take me, to be so
 bold
 i love you
 and i will never stop loving you
 until the rains cease to fall and the skies stop turning blue
 "you" — my right-hand man, as i am my left
 if i did have anyone else, i know i will still have you left
 my joy, my felicity, my strength
 i love you deeply from head to toe, every last hair to every
 inch
 i will be the one to clinch you tight
 through hard times and stop to hear and answer your cries
 last me our lifetimes and hereafter, feelings to immortalize
 me and you, we stand hand in hand
 wanting to never let you go and to never feel abandoned
 feeling your every touch
 always brings me peace and sends me a strong rush
 my soul, my thoughts, my dreams, with whom, but to you i
 trust
 me and you, your skin, hair, your wide brown eyes, even
 your scent
 trust in your heart, after all my heart's twists and bends
 your style, your walk, your look, and your talk
 we two will watch each other age, under the gazing
 midnight stars
 we sit until the clouds disappear, the moon glows and skies
 go dark
 just me and you ...

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: A love poem as expansive as all of time and space possible to contain within the human heart, unfathomable the depths of love beyond all measure or finite thought, and yet you seek to give it voice, to shape this inchoate feeling into a vision painted with words of choice precision. At the least it is a testament of wondrous wish, and at the most a monument of thunderous bliss — the image of an eternal kiss that lives longer than the bodies of lovers exist.

If Women

If women had respect for themselves
 There would be no prostitution
 If women had respect for themselves
 There would be no strip clubs
 If women had respect for themselves
 Men would have respect for them also
 If women stood up for themselves
 They wouldn't get taken advantage of.
 If women had respect, it would bring 'em power
 If women had power, they would have money.
 If women had all these things
 Then they would run the world
 If women ran the world
 The world would be a better place.
 In honor of women's month.

-Bianca, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Bianca, we really like your work. It is very empowering for women. What is respect? What does it feel like? Why is it that some women do not have respect for themselves? Do they learn this? Do boys learn to disrespect girls and women at a young age? How are those lessons taught? What makes being a woman special?

Kicked, Slipped and Committed My Crime

Hey, Beat. What's up! It's ya boy Reese once again, to tell all of you's what drew me to crime is way back in the days when I didn't take things serious, when I showed off. I was really off the wall.

When me and my lady lived together, she would work a part-time job, and so would I. We both worked hella hard. She would pay the rent, and I would smoke the other half. I would smoke the PG&E bill away, and we would be sitting in the dark telling stories to each other, like wondering if PG&E would take "doobies" to turn our lights back on and give us some heat before our lighters blow up in our hands!

It got so bad, my relationship was going down the drain and we started to hate each other. It was me choosing to spend what I work for on something that would be here when I am long gone, or choose between someone that cares for me. So I kicked the habit, and things were a little better — but time went on and it, the love that we had when she first met me, came back.

Then a disagreement on one of my old ways, got me in a slump once again, and I couldn't bear to tell her what I did. So I robbed an old man, and I got caught like a dumbazz! The reason why I got caught so easy is because I am not a criminal and I don't think like one.

If I was to choose between doing crime, robbing people for what I need, I'd rather be broke and put in overtime on the job — 'cause laziness kills a man's future. Until next time, I'm out, Beat!

-Reese, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel what you're saying about money and crime, it ain't worth a dime for your future and destroys your piece of mind in the present — even if you hadn't gotten caught up, how good were you going to be feeling about robbing an old man to back up a lie, all of which was just feeding your addiction! And the stronger your addiction got, as you know, the worse your life got. Have you been to NA or AA meetings. They'll tell you addiction shows in more ways than just drug consumption. Well, let this be your bottom and start back up, clean! Thanks for a great story with a positive, moral lesson.

...the streets ain't it fo' the type of life style I want to live in the future, with my beautiful wife, six to ten kids, a big house near to or right beside the beach, and working a good, decent job. You know what I'm saying, just a nice average life, takin' care of my kids and caterin' to my wife.

In Ten Years

W'a's up, Beat? It's yo' boy Young B. Yo, I'm here not doing shhh but sitting around waiting to go the Mills. But what I really want to do is ask myself something: where do I see myself in ten years? I say in ten years I will have my own house or something like that. I will be going to college, and playing basketball.

What I really want to do is get married and own my own house. But you see it take a lot to get all of that, so I thought of a way to get all of that. Like go to school every day and tryin' to get a job. But you have to take your time 'cause if you go too fast you might miss something. To get something you want you have to play it like chess 'cause whatever move you make you have to watch and think about that move.

But you know my time is up so all I want to say is stay up and keep moving forward instead of going backward.

-Young-B B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What we admire most about this piece, Young B, is the fact that you know all change takes time, and to do it little-by-little, 'cause if you try to change everything all at once you will only get frustrated. But at the same time, the path you've set for yourself seems to us to be exactly the right path to keep yourself moving forward: school every day, and see where that leads. When we look into our crystal ball, we see you happily married with a decent job taking care of your family, eyes open all the down falls that you will eventually come across. If there is a will there's surely a way. It's your purpose to find the way behind your will.

If Drew Could Start Over

If I could wake up tomorrow, start over and have a new life, I would start with my family. Instead of going back in time startin' over though, I would like to start anew, clean slate from here on out.

The reason why I say that, is 'cause I feel like the path of destruction I've walked, been through so far, not only has helped me become a better and a stronger young man but also has taught me to take life way more seriously and to believe in others — it has given me a whole new set of glasses or mind frame, or you might say a new set of eyes.

Before I was incarcerated, I didn't even care whether I lived or died! I know it sounds crazy, but I really didn't care. I didn't care about the values in others or believe that they could help me become a better person if only I took the time to listen to their advice on life and how to survive in the real world.

'Cause the streets ain't it fo' the type of life style I want to live in the future, with my beautiful wife, six to ten kids, a big house near to or right beside the beach, and working a good, decent job. You know what I'm saying, just a nice average life, takin' care of my kids and caterin' to my wife. I would be mo' into (involved with) my brothers' and sisters' lives.

I'm glad of my situation now, 'cause not only has it helped me, it has also helped my younger siblings not follow my path of destruction that I lived as I was comin' up. I talk to them and let them know my mistakes and how to better their lives the right way, so they can come up better in life than I have up till now.

-Drew, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We were already touting the wisdom of this piece, the same night you wrote it, during the topic discussion in later units that same night, 'cause you take this very difficult experience of incarceration in Alameda County Juvenile Hall on your way to CYA, and see the blessing hidden within the adversity. It takes a man of heart and courage to see things the way you do, and explain it like this to readers of The Beat, many of whom still think the only mistake they made was in getting caught. Thanks for sharing your hard-earned wisdom with us all.

The First Thing I Will Do

Well, besides going to a group home near the Sierra Nevada Mountains, I will get my raggedy-ass clothes and then go with my PO to my group home. My aunt said that in the Bible, once you leave a place that is uncomfortable or is not your home, you dust off your shoes, because you leave behind your past with the dust on the floor. That's the first thing I am going to do.

This will be my last piece that was written in YGC. As for what I am going to do at my group home, I'm not quite sure how the first month will go, but I have every intention to do and be the best I can be. My life has completely changed for the better. The only thing that is stopping me now is myself. Like a wise man once said, do the right thing because it's the night thing to do. Adios Amigos and que dios te bendiga!

-Big B B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good luck, Israel, in your new group home. You have come a long way, and we appreciate all the wonderful writing you have contributed to us. We love your auntie's Biblical advice about dusting off your shoes in the place you're leaving. We'll try that ourselves! Stay strong and be yourself!

Many Things Drew Me To Crime

I think there are many reasons that drew me to crime. One reason for me is robbing people because I want to have what they have immediately. Sometimes these things that people have stay on my mind until I find a way to steal them somehow or get money to buy them. A lot of my "friends" do this to people and I think that it doesn't make sense.

I have realized that when I take another person's possession you never know how special it was to him. He may have gotten it from his relatives or parents and it may mean a lot to him. This is a major reason why I have decided to stop robbing people.

Basically the reason I got drawn to this life was because of my need to have something and to get it without paying for it. In the end it is not worth serving a long time locked up just for wanting something - that isn't worth your freedom. Sometimes I may not even realize that I am hurting people and invading their privacy by robbing their houses and stealing their cars. They may have been hurt somehow mentally for a long time or even permanently if something valuable enough was stolen.

-Up, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a very uplifting piece. It shows a lot of growth and maturity that you recognize how hurtful stealing other people's things can be, even when you want what they have, and that people have a right to expect privacy in their homes and cars. We hope now you recognize the difference between what you "need" and what you "want" because all of us want things that we can't have the minute we want them. We have to do what adults do — defer satisfying our desires until we are able to pay for them.

In the end it is not worth
serving a long time locked up
just for wanting something -
that isn't worth your freedom.

An Awful Problem

My problem is that I can't seem to stay out of trouble. It's because all my life I lived with my parents and sister. And just out of nowhere, things started to happen. I mean, things would happen, sometimes, when we were together, but we would figure them out.

This time was different. Things got heavier. Parents fought more. I was introduced to drugs and alcohol. Then one day my mom decided to leave my dad. They didn't do it legally, so it was more complicated. They wanted us to choose and they couldn't separate me and my sister. They would make us feel bad about who we chose. So my mom went to a program and my dad went his separate way.

My mom put us with her mom until she got out, which would be in five years. Within those five years I would do drugs, drink, never come home, and worry my sister and grandma. So then they took my sister from me. I mean they sent her to my aunt's, and I had never been away from her, and it got worse. I got on probation, kept getting into trouble, and now, finally, I'm locked up. Reality hit me hard, and it's nothing nice.

While I'm locked up, my sister would do drugs, drink, fail school (after she was a straight A student). And she would talk about killing herself, and I couldn't do anything. That's what my problem is.

-Wardell, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Wardell, this is sad and disturbing story, but very well told. You are a fine writer. Most problems have solutions. We'd like you to tell us how you see yourself resolving your problems. Who have you asked for help? Besides your grandma and your aunts, what other adults are around? Where is your dad? You are clearly a smart fellow. With strong intent and hard work, you can come out of this mess. Your sister needs help too, as you know. Provide her a good example. Put your life together and it may be the best thing you can do to help her. By the way, (though you may know it), you share a name with one of the great jazz saxophone players. His name was Wardell Gray.

Make Me Whole Again

in a to-be accomplishment
to make me whole again
bring me back from those
and free me of my sins
turn my skin
inside out to show my true colors
bright, dark, brown, green
or like a bouquet of flowers
close my open wounds
and release me from immorality
open my eyes and show me
to the greatness of love and humanity
grab my hand and help me
come to realize my ways
close the tall steel gates to my heart
leaving nothing unwanted to invade
help everyone understand
so no one misinterprets
give me the wisdom to see the flip side
so i can transcend the worthless
in any way or means possible
to make me whole again
refresh and rejuvenate my thinking pattern
and kill the thought of sin
whisper your secrets to me
while i am weary and vulnerable
hold my head so as to make me
feel icy and comfortable
pierce my arms
to let me know i am real
and show me your reasons of emotion
so i can feel the things you feel
show me clear sight
to see the things i missed
that to be wealthy isn't a thing
but love is to be rich
tear through my raw flesh
and uncover the hidden
cleanse my ears
so it is never a problem of hearing
in an upcoming mission
to make me clean and whole again

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Like a poem by one of the famous seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, this song reaches toward the gates of heaven. Or like a penitent in somber meditation before the image of Jesus on the Cross, you call out for the power to feel the passion of Christ in his supreme act of love — not so you can be divine but wholly human, made clean and whole again in the eyes of God. Such a plea cannot fail to be answered, if you are in turn ready to answer your desire with a commitment to action, to live "clean and whole again".

The Beat
Within

My Environment Drew Me To Crime

My surroundings and my community drew me to crime. The love of money and women drove me to do crimes. I had positive role models, but at the same time I was broke wit' no geets and no clothes. I was in the dog house.

My life has not been the best. Almost every night I hear gunshots or police sirens.

What drew me to crime? Influence. If you grow up watching people you know die holdin' guns at a young age, smokin' and hangin' around gangstas, what you gonna be? Now you ask me what drew me to crime. Ask yourself what crime really is.

-Edub B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Okay! We really like this because of the way you ended it! We often ask ourselves who the real criminals are — the ones pulling licks for nickels and dimes or the ones at the tops of corporations stealing millions from poor workers? The children with no parents and no options, or the police who harass and brutalize them? We would love to see you take that last question and write an entire piece about that. You've got the skills.

Mama

Mama, why did you leave me when I was just two?

You said you love me, but I didn't see it in you
You told me, "You need your father—I'll give you some time"

But ten years is enough, you've killed my living rhyme

I cried and beat my fists, bloody, on the door

I waited for your voice, though it was no more

Then one day you called and said, "I care"

But you didn't comfort me when I needed you there

I have a new mom and that mom is me

I comfort me, so get off of your knees

I don't like beggars; I'm ashamed of you, mom

All my life you had no clue what's going on

I'm not sure this is blues, but it's you I despise

My bile creeps up my throat when I look in your eyes

I hope you're anguished and that that emotion sticks

How does it feel to be left behind crying?

How does it feel to be kicked at while dying?

This is how I feel, but one thing's never gonna be the same

I'll never come back, no matter how much you pray

If you live your life with tears running down your face

I'll be the happiest man alive; you have no taste

I'll put the word "abandon" straight into your brain

Burn it onto your forehead; make you feel its pain

I may be sick and twisted; I may be wrong

But the hate I feel for you won't soon be gone

How or why you did this, I don't even care

Your excuses don't mean anything if you were never there

So don't expect me to cry and run into your house

Because I was birthed my a coward; to me you're a louse

-Dominic, Marin

From The Beat: We seldom give POW status to poems dedicated to hate, Dominic, but this is so much more than that — a poem filled with anguish and pain. There probably isn't anything much worse than being a child who has been abandoned by his mother. The one thing that worries us about the intensity of your hate is this — regardless of her crime against you, you are still her biological product, which means some of this hate may unconsciously be directed at yourself as the extension of her. From the perspective of a stranger (as we are), we feel an abundance of pain and sympathy for both of you. Whatever demons drove her to give you up and not follow up must be very real, and very destructive to you both. And the fact that you are still writing poems to and of her — especially poems as passionate as this one — tells us that you are still a part of her and she of you. We don't know what your intentions are with regard to any kind of relationship with her, if any at all. And we're not encouraging any particular path of action. What we are encouraging, though, is some genuine compassion, because we think by bestowing such grace, you are finally being compassionate to yourself.

Daría Todo Por Recuperar Lo Mío

Lo que daría por recuperar lo que he perdido. Daría todo si se tratara principal de recuperar a mi novia. La amo con todas mis fuerzas y me siento muy culpable de todo lo que ha pasado. Le pido a Dios que me ayude para seguir adelante. Algún día me da la libertad y voy a tartar de recuperar todo lo que he perdido.

Yo me creie con mis abuelos allá en Honduras. Mis hermanitos eran pandilleros y con el tiempo a uno de mis hermano lo mataron. El otro estuvo preso por ocho años por un crimen que cometo por venganza.

Cuando llegue aqui no conocía a nadie de mi familia. Todos me querían apoyar porque ellos sabían que yo había sufrido mucho. Yo no sentía nada por ellos y empeece a juntarme con pandilleros y a cometer crímenes y a caer preso en la juvenile. Ahora veo todo diferente. Siento que desde que empeece a andar en las pandillas ya no soy el niño que se ve físicamente porque por dentro y un hombre y quiero luchar por todo lo que he perdido. Va pues.

From The Beat: Sentimos mucho lo que te ha pasado a ti y a tus hermanos. Sinceramente necesitas buscar la mejor manera como salirte de las cosas que estas haciendo. Se nota de volada que has escogido el camino equivocado el cual te llebara al mismo lugar que te encuentras o a otro que no queremos recordarte. No tomes como excusas el sufrimiento que has pasado y hacer cosas malas para demostrar que no estas dolido. Este mundo fue diseñado para pasar por momentos buenos y malos, y pues has pasado los malos. Es hora que despiertes y te quites la vendas que te estan cubriendo los ojos y previniendo ver la realidad de este mundo. Tienes gente que te quieren mucho y estan dispuesto a apoyarte en todo. No seas egoista con tu misma vida.

I Would Give Everything To Recover What's Mine

What I would give to recover what I have lost? I would give everything if it meant in principal me regaining my girlfriend. I love her with all my strength and I feel very guilty of everything that has taken place. I beg God to help me to continue forward. Someday, He'll give me my freedom and I am going to try to recover everything that I have lost.

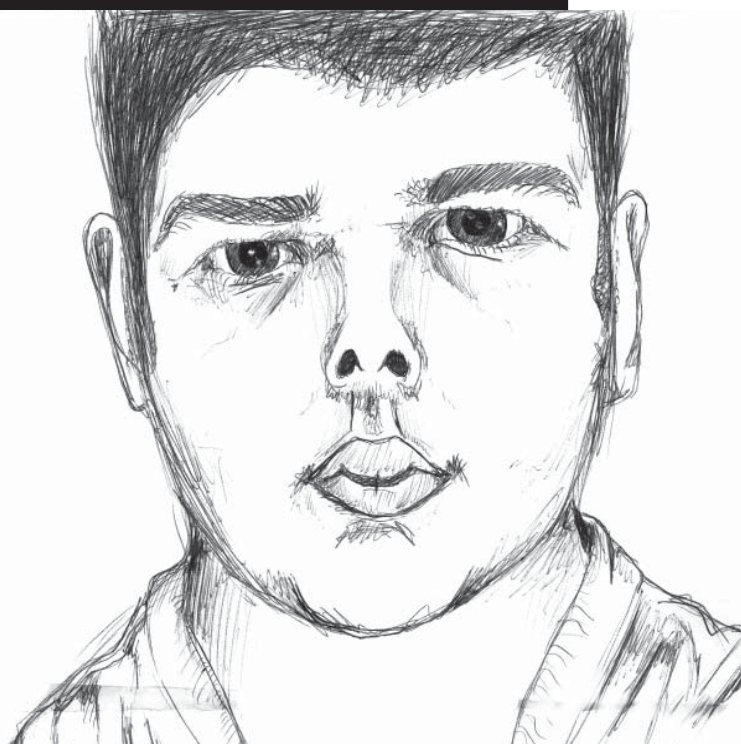
I grew up with my grandfathers over in Honduras. My little brothers were gang-bangers and with time, one of my brothers got killed. The other one was locked up for eight years for a crime he committed for revenge.

When I arrived over here, I did not know anyone from my family. Everyone wanted to support me because they knew that I had suffered a lot. I did not feel anything towards them and I started to hang out with gangsters and I started to commit crimes and I started to get locked up in Juvenile. Now I see everything different. I feel that ever since I started to hang out with gangs, I am no longer the boy that you see physically because on the inside, I am a man and I want to fight for everything that I have lost. All right then.

-Jonathan, LCRS

From The Beat: We regret to hear about what has happened to you and your brothers. Honestly, you need to find the best way to get yourself out of the things that you are doing. We can get told right of the bat that you have chosen the wrong path, you know it will lead you right back to where you find yourself right now or to another place that we do not want to remind you. Don't use all the suffering that you have been through as an excuse to do bad things to prove that it has not affected or hurt you. This world was designed for one to go through good and bad moments and, well, you've been through the bad ones. It is time for you to wake up and to remove the blindfold that's covering your eyes and preventing you from seeing the reality of this world. You have people who love you very much and are willing and ready to support you in everything. Don't be egoistical with your own life.

**Siento que desde que empeece
a andar en las pandillas
ya no soy el niño que se ve
físicamente**



The Past

Even though I hate being here and even curse myself for doing the things I've done, I know in the long run it'll all work out. I'll have a testimony like no other. My life might help someone else.

This experience has taught me a lot, shown me what and what not to do. My life will go on. I'll become that great man in my dreams. I'll be famous. It's my destiny. I've just got to remember what I've done. The accomplishments and mistakes I've made. All of this is a lesson in a class that never ends until death. Long as I move on, wisely, and never forget... the past.

-T-Bone, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We don't know what you did to land yourself inside a cage, but we know you bring some very different and very admirable thinking to your situation. From what you've written and how you've written it, we don't doubt for a second that you will be famous for your accomplishments. Just don't allow yourself to become famous for the wrong accomplishments. Know what we mean?

It took me a while to
realize that they took me in their home for a reason and I was there

What We Go Through

What we go through is more than just the cycle of life
The generation of children are on a whole 'nother hype

But these days for life,

You have to fight,

We do a lot of wrong

Even when we know what's right,

When youngstas walk past

Y'all wanna hold your purses tight,

That gives us the idea, Rob them?

I might get off and come back that night

But I have an idea that's extremely bright

While you report it to the police

We're within your eyesight.

You can't relate to where we come from,

We need money to get stuff done,

But we won't beg — that's considered for bums,

As our life get devoured

Everyone try to be hard and not known as a coward

Popping pills with the thizz face,

Look like you licked something sour

And what about the prostitutes

That make 20 dollars an hour.

This is really about reality,

People get teased on how they look and they sexuality

But what about their quality,

In the streets you have followed deep

Hopefully the lord Jesus one day you'll meet.

We all get a laugh at times

But its time to stop making someone else cry

'Cause we probably won't be remembered the day we die

'Cause the main sin we commit is thou shall not lie.

But laugh now cry later is Danielle Morris's advise

'Cause we're living a bad life

As our generation's considered nothing but a killing device.

Do you know what we go through

When we trust that we're in love,
Dreaming of a baby blue wedding with white doves,
So sensational like the skies above
But you don't see perfection when push comes to shove,
What to do when your heart is broke,
You can't speak and it feels as if you will choke,
But all dudes see you as is a joke
But the jokes on him because my sins,
I will gradually repent.

Can you imagine what I go through

With these fake ass staff?

No matter how you look at it

They get the last laugh

But really my freedom they only have half

They have authority 'cause I gave up my rights

But pretty soon I'll see the sun's beautiful light.

I wonder if they like to push us around

Because they know we're not button proof

And it brings our spirits down

But it will always be a person

To act out as the clown

And that gets the group locked down.

This is stuff I go through on a daily basis,

I'm paying my price and I have to face this,

For '06 this was last on my list

But I jeopardized my future and took the risk.

I have to speak my mind and express it as I do
But for our lasting history racism was part of it too
So who are you to judge us on what we go through?

-No Name, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Damn! We wish we knew who wrote this great poem! Although you explained a whole lot, we can tell that this is just a glimpse of your pain. We wonder if 'what you go through' is enough to make you want to change. (You wrote that you "will gradually repent" but gradual repentance is concept we can't grasp, like being "a little pregnant...") Do you feel like we're responsible for what we go through? Or do you feel like you were a victim of circumstances that were so cruel? Or is it a combination of both? Whatever the case, we hope you're heard and continue to be heard, because we want skills like yours to get the attention they deserve.

Yes Or No

Hey, what's up people? This is Clover! This week has not been my week. Well, I don't know if you guys remember my story called "Just Me" but it was basically about my ex-boyfriend and how he was really abusive to me. Well here's the next part to it.

A couple of days ago I got told I had to go to court against him. The DA chose to press charges. When I found out, I was angry! Everything he did to me flashed into my eyes. I didn't know how to feel. All my emotions came up in my mind. I was so scared I didn't know why all this was happening to me. I didn't know if I was ready for this.

A couple hours after I was told, I found out I wasn't the only victim. There was two other girls a lot younger than me, accusing him of rape. I froze. But, at the same time I felt relieved that I wasn't the only one. I wasn't that much scared any more. They gave three weeks to decide if I'm going to press charges or not. It's like my heart is telling me no, but my head is telling me yes. I'm confused. I don't know if I will survive this I don't know if I'm strong enough.

I guess I'm just going to have to wait and see what happens. I want revenge but this wasn't what I was thinking. I want him to feel pain as much pain as what I felt. I don't want him sitting behind bars. I don't think he deserves that. I think he deserves a program and some anger-management classes. I don't what my decision will be!

-Clover, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: This is such an honest piece of writing and feeling, Clover. We can understand your conflicted emotions, and especially your reluctance to put him behind bars when what he really needs is some re-education. But at the same time, what he did to you and the younger girls is totally unacceptable, and he must be stopped or some other child will experience what you experienced, or worse. We can't tell you what to do, but we can tell you that we think you are much stronger than you think you are. You may wish that this wasn't happening, but it's going to happen with your or without you, so we think your testimony should be heard. We don't want him to think that he can rape a person without any consequences whatsoever. Please let us know what you decide and what happens.

A Day In My Life

My alarm goes off around 6:30 AM, every morning. I get up, brush my grill, lace up my work boots, and I'm ready to start my day.

I work on cleaning stalls for about an hour, 'til it's time to start feeding the horses. I locate my four-wheeler, connect a trailer and drive to the haystacks. A bale of hay can weigh between 80 to 200 pounds, depending on the type of hay. We stock grass hay, oat hay and alfalfa hay.

It's important that the animals get a mixed diet. If a horse is continuously fed only alfalfa for a long period of time, it can founder and die. We have around 50 horses on a 30 acre ranch. It takes about an hour to feed the horses and we do it twice a day - once in the morning and once at night. We give each horse individual grain and supplements during the afternoon.

After morning feeding, I continue cleaning stalls. If I'm the only one doing it, it takes three or four hours. And that's making good time. You might think that shoveling horse shhh is easy, but take it from me, it isn't. My family runs a horse boarding ranch and the boarders expect their stalls to be done professionally.

While I'm sitting in juvenile hall, my old man has to pay someone \$10 an hour to do the basic manual labor I was doing. It's easy enough for me because I was born and raised on ranches all my life.

I plan on continuing to improve my skills with animals, tools and machines when I get out. There is a lot of money to be made in the equine business if you know what you are doing. Because I have problems in school, it's the way for me to go.

-Ben, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Ben, we don't know what kind of trouble you've been having in school, but it can't be with writing. This is a wonderful piece, very clear and very precise. You are a natural. And many thanks for sharing with us, in such direct language, what it's like to spend a day in your shoes. With so many folks living in cities and suburbs, a great description of what it's like to live on a ranch is an eye opener. Not many could, or would even want to, work as hard as you do, every day.

The Ponderingness Of Life

The horror, the stricken-down bluntness of it, hit me and it hit me hard. Gasping for air, I rose unsteadily onto one leg; my other was apparently napping through my emotions.

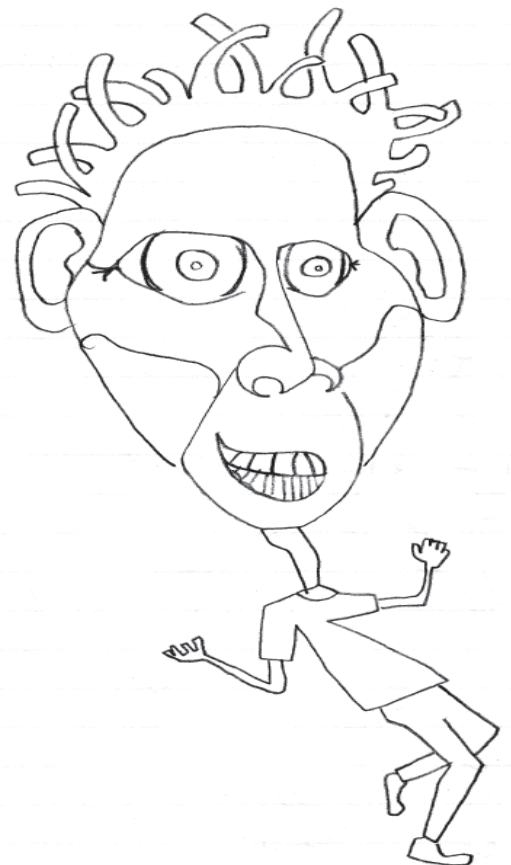
"How?" I whispered. I half expected a response to whisper right back at me. My fingernails bit against my palm until blood arrived. The sweat ran in waves down my forehead and I whispered again, "How?" this time with slightly more urgency. I waited for a good ten or twenty seconds, long enough to feel the blood on my palms dry up, and then exclaimed, sharply, "How?"

I jumped with the word as I yelled, because my left eye caught movement that was not me. Somewhere in my head, a chandelier crashed and then my right eye noticed it, too. "How weird," I thought, "to have only one eye at a time, paying attention. How weird is that?" To how weird that was, I never found out, because I felt a sharp pain race up and down my arms like a soccer ball, creating pain of a caliber I'd never felt before.

My mind raced with thoughts of what I would find if I happened to look down—a bullet wound? No, I didn't hear a shot. A silencer could've... no, not enough pain. Did I just get stabbed? No, no one around for miles. How about... Face it, you don't know. And I don't know. My body frozen to the spot and my blood hardened in mid-drip, I all of a sudden didn't want to look down, for I might find what I am feeling, and that would lose the ponderingness, yes, ponderingness, of it. What it was, I shall never know.

-Scorpion, Marin

From The Beat: You are a terrific story teller Scorpion, even when we can't tell what's at the heart of this mystery. Have you speculated about what this experience really was? Can you share your speculations with us? Do you think this was purely a physical manifestation of your mind, or was something really physical happening? Or, is this a metaphor for how unexpected events in life can lay you low and cause you pain even when you can't understand where they originate or why you deserve it? How did this experience end?



Listen Up: Time To Change

Ain't nothing in the streets but pain, anger, stress, and death. Time to change. You can call me a sucka, but I say forget the streets. Your turf, my turf, ain't nothing for us out there but jail and a wood box. Time to change — Blacks, Whites, and Mexicans.

The system don't help us, it hurts us more. Basically it fails us. This is what they want. To break us or our spirit. Check it real talk, who mostly is in jails and prisons? Blacks and Mexicans. Time to change. They gonna keep building new jails and locking us up 'till there is no more of us to lock up.

The chains of depression, it's time to break them, real talk. Lets stop messing up, show the system oppressor it's time to change. Some like to see young men locked up. Free your self and your mind.

-Black Hope, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There's a sense of desperation in this piece — a recognition that the system makes your situation worse and will not change, leaving it up to you to make the change. And we feel the same way. We had a prisoner friend once who told us, "If every criminal in America went straight today, the entire economy would collapse tomorrow!" And entire industry — the very fat "corrections" industry — lives off the backs of those it can label criminals. It is time to change because it's not getting any easier out here. What are your plans for freedom? If change starts with the individual, what specific changes do you see bringing about in your own life? We love your Beat name because Black Hope is exactly what is needed. If you act what you speak, we don't think you'll have a problem succeeding in life. If you're a "sucka," then we need a lot more suckas...

It took me a while to realize
that they took me in their
home for a reason and I was
there for a purpose!

Something You Wouldn't Know If You Saw Me

Hey Beat. This is Lil' Neph writing again to you. Well today I'm going to tell you something you wouldn't know if you saw me! Well I'm an adopted kid. My reaction to my parents telling me I was adopted was very shocking for me in my life and hard to take in.

I was six when I was told by my parents at that age and I flipped! I wouldn't listen to them and at the age of 9 or 10 I was out in the streets trying to fend for myself! I would stay from place to place, bridge to bridge. I did not respect my parents at all! I've been locked up a lot in my life! And the only people were my parents through thick and thin! It took me a while to realize that they took me in their home for a reason and I was there for a purpose!

Now at the age I'm at I realize that they are my real parents for life and they will be by my side no matter what I do! To all you out there that despise your step parents or someone that took you under their household, don't because what you will realize is that no one will be there but them. If I can, you can. Well I'm out Beat.

-Lil' Neph, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is such an important and uplifting piece, Lil' Neph. We can understand how you might flip out at age six to learn that you were adopted, and to conclude that your adoptive parents weren't your "real" parents. That's why it makes us so happy to see that you realized that they made a conscious choice to bring you into their lives. You were no mistake, you were who and what they wanted. Yes, they are your "real" parents, and what you write here tells us that you are their "real" son. Please show this piece to them because it's important for them to see it. And when you get out of here, show them the love and respect they deserve by never letting yourself be taken away from them again!

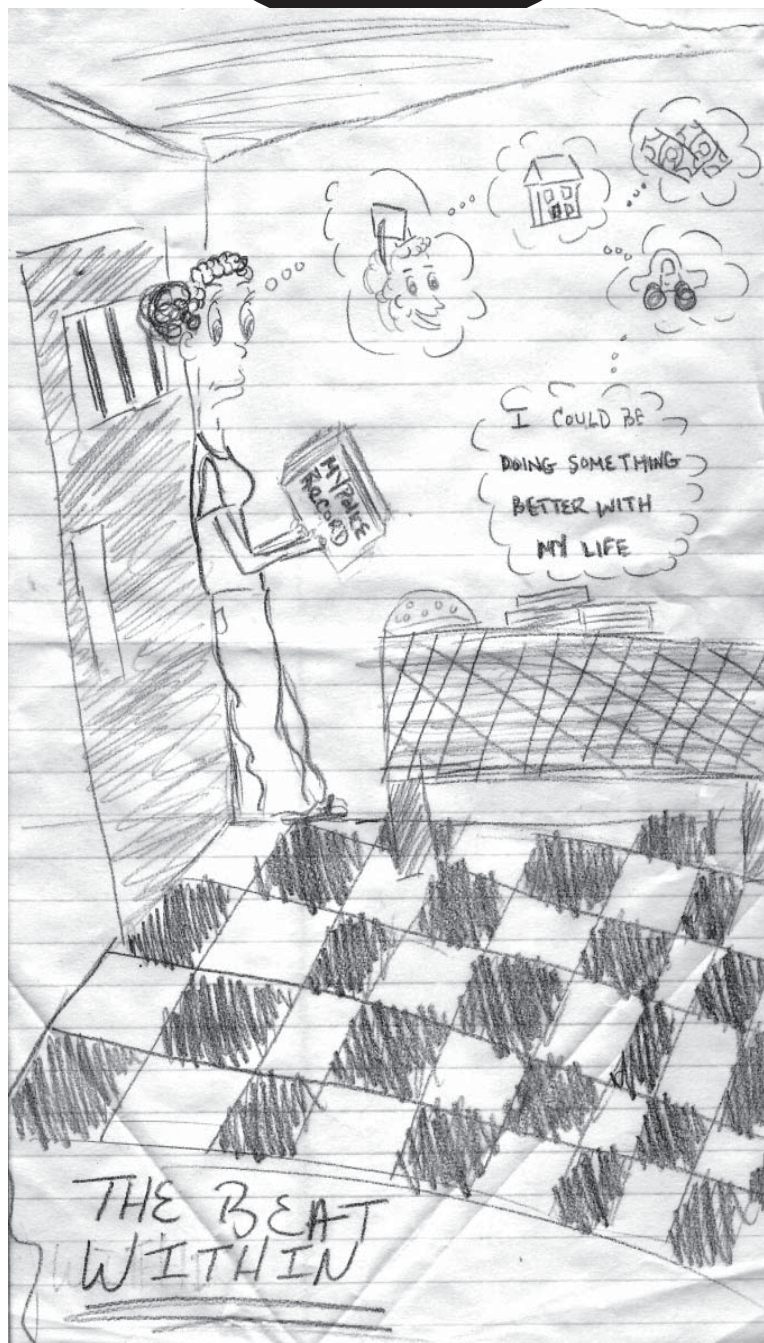
Laughter Brightens My Spirit

What brightens my spirit is laughter. Laughter is that special thing that lightens the weights that life have burdened on you. Laughter is that thing that gives you that extra "oomph" that you need to lift the weights of life off you.

You know those days you have when you just be like, "Forget this shhhh!" but you look back and review your life and laugh about it. And all of a sudden you're not so depressed or angry any more. It's like being high... without the purple, yadadadadig.

-Kalann B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You are so right, Kalann — maybe even more than you know. It's been shown that laughter releases the same kind of pleasurable chemicals in the brain that some drugs (like the purple) also release in the brain, but without the negative effects. It has also been shown that laughter acts like a medicine for sick and old people. So, doctor, you have come up with a universal cure for what ails you, and we congratulate you! (We have a friend who lost both of his legs when he went under a train, and he was so very depressed — until he started looking at "Three Stooges" cartoons. He started laughing so hard, he forgot how depressed he was. It helped him transition back into the world.)



My Life

I moved back to the Bay at nine years old. I was stayin' with my mom and my big brother (Diamond) and my big sister (Inissha). But most of the time my mom was in and out of jail. Most of the time I was going to school, getting into fights. And because I would win all my fights, all the girls liked me.

When I was on the block I made a name for myself. Then when I was 12 my brother went to the halls and the POs was asking my brother hella questions about my mom. So he said ask her. And she got mad at that and said come on son. Then three weeks later, some people came to my house and said me and Diamond we couldn't live with moms no more. Then next thing I know this girl came to my house and said she was my sister and she was in the army and she lived in N.O. Next thing I know we was on our way to go stay with her.

When we first got to our new house my sister had us clean up all the time, even her room. I started school a week after I got there and it was hella fillafu's (girls) at the school house. I was on them left and right. I was in the 7th grade and was on the football team, and I had all the girls in the school on my line 'cause they didn't know no one from the Bay. Also, I talked different from everyone else. It seem like all the fillafu's out there was ready for whatever. So after I spit my LRP (long rang pimpin') I had them doing that you could only dream of.

But since everything out there was so far away, I would ride my bike to their houses. It was nothing to me 'cause when the mom or dad came home, I was out the window and on my bike in 3.5 sec. Then I start being down with this one kid name Joe, and Joe would do whatever you told him. One day it was me and him and we was walking to this girl's house. On the way he was like, "I know a shorter way," so we walked down this rode that was in front of a line of houses. The first house was big and when we walked past the house, this man came outside with a handgun and started to shoot at us. I ran so fast that when I looked back Joe was about five cars behind me. Then I seen him get hit in the arm but he didn't stop running. When we got back to his house his mom said he would be ok and didn't do shhh.

Two weeks later, me and my brother ran in this house and came up on two Gs and a 9 mm. Then one day I went back to the house of the man.

(To be continued...)

-Qbb B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Wow, that must have been a scary event, some guys just come out of his house shooting at you guys. What happened to that guy — or will that be revealed in what's to come? However this turned out, we have to think about how it could have turned out, with you shot, or having to shoot someone else. Some consequence last a lifetime... We're looking forward to the next installment, but we hope that you will try not to glorify certain things. Your LRP works better on the girls than on us...

I have realized a lot since I have been here, and the biggest thing that I am willing to give up to get my life back is "the life I have been livin'."

New Path

I believe that this time I will follow a new path instead of treading down the beaten one. The best path for my life would be a new path because the old path consisted of drug use and abuse of my body and mind.

This new path is much better for my well being because I would be clean and my friends and family and even I, will like myself much more. Also, the new path would let my mind expand and my soul reach out to the people who want to help me.

-Sara, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: You're right. Well said. What brought you to this beautiful way of thinking? Do you think something other than incarceration could have made you come to this conclusion? Hopefully you remain solid in the face of temptation.

Dear The Beat

It's me, again, and I have been here for almost two weeks. I'm not trippin', though. That's nothing. I'm the only girl up in here and tomorrow is Thursday, and I'm supposed to get released. I have realized a lot since I have been here, and the biggest thing that I am willing to give up to get my life back is "the life I have been livin'."

Well, you see, this last time that I was out, I went on the run for two months. Words cannot explain why I did what I did, but it was a dumb decision and it got me right back where I started. I don't remember much about that Friday, but I was just chillin' at my homegirl's house and she told me that she was going to the town to see her man and that she was going to be gone until Saturday. I told her if I could invite some heads over to chill? She said, "For sure," so I did. To make a long story short, I bought a thizz pill and popped it with this girl. I was perkin' a little bit, but that night I decided to be coo' off them 40s Mickey's.

Anyways, hella heads came through and I ended up doing acid for the first time. It took about an hour to hit me. It was about midnight and was the last time I remember anything. It turned out that I started to trip out and my guy friends didn't know what to do, so they walked me to Davidson Middle School in San Rafael and called the police and left me there. I woke up in the hospital, not remembering anything that happened that night. The police found me at 4:00 a.m. in front of the middle school naked. I had no idea what had happened. Luckily I wasn't hurt and I ended up getting booked here once again.

They say drugs cloud your judgment, right? Well, they almost killed me! So for all you kids who think it's coo', think twice.

-Careina, Marin

From The Beat: What you've written may help lots of teenagers consider whether using drugs is worth the risks. It must truly frighten you to think of all that might have happened that night. It frightens us. Sometimes it takes a scare as serious as this one to focus your attention and make you realize what's truly important. It's clear to us that is exactly what has happened to you, and that now you're ready for some major changes in your life. Change itself can be scary, but if you keep a clear head and move forward one step at a time, you'll find yourself in an entirely different place — one that you will remember and be able to handle. Don't leave here without a plan because if you do, others will plan for you. You have too much to give to risk it all on artificial stimulants.

If I Had A Baby

If I had a baby, I would be there for my son or daughter because I would not want them to be like me. I would like them to go to college. And I want them to do good with their life. I don't want them to end up in juvenile hall like I did for a year and three months. I don't want them to go in and out of jail. I don't want them in gangs.

I don't want them to know the grimy part of the streets. I don't want them to do drugs. I don't want them to sell drugs.

I'm going to put my kids in after school programs. They going to play sports.

-Little Cousin B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This piece shows you've spent the very long time you've been locked up thinking about important things in your life and in your future. Of course, succeeding in all these things requires that you complete your program and get back into the world little by little, not risking your own freedom ever again. That's what you want for your children. That what we want for you!

Fights In The Hall

What's up Beat? This yo' boy J-Gutta and today I'm not gone write on Beat topics. I'm gone write on B5 fights. Man, this shhh is ridiculous. First off, let me start off by saying, why fight in the halls when you know damn well you only got 10 to 20 seconds to fight? Let me break it down for you jailhouse readers. You use 5 seconds to get off on the ninja or beezy, then you got 10 seconds to crease the ninja or beezy like some brand new YGC khakis that you get on cottage clean up. Yes, I know it's crucial but that's how it is.

Anyway, back on subject... You then have 5 seconds to get wrestled around by staff and you know damn well some staff be ready to dip a ninja on his knowledge box. And don't think you gone fight, then not be touched. Shhhh! You got different counselors coming from different units ready to take they anger out on you. And the reason I know this is because I almost was a victim of peace officer brutality.

And why the hell do they call them peace officers? Ain't nothing peaceful about being slammed on yo' knowledge box! Well Beat, my creative hands are aching. Until next time...

-J-Gutta B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're spitting some real knowledge here, and we appreciate it. Why go to jail in jail? Nobody wants to be locked in a cell more than they are already forced to. You're right. It's a waste of time to be fighting in the halls. Why do you think it happens so often? We're glad to see that you think about things like this. We hope a lot more of your peers would do the same.

My Thoughts

Thoughts come to mind
As I stare to the page
With the pencil of my imagination
For my thoughts are my true creation
No one can replace or try to imitate them
They are mine to create and destroy
As I deploy the lead to the paper
My deepest of thoughts
Began to be expressed
As the rest of what is going on
Means nothing at all
I tend to fall
In an awoken step
Uncontrollably writing
Nearly frighten
By my unbelievable passion
And craft for the art
The sea of waves
In which I control
Surround the Beat
For it is I
Who wishes to write
And share what I have to offer
Make knowledge
Or experience
Sometimes I just want to relate
To what me people are going thru
But as long as I write
The light is on
Which is what I think
Keeps me going
My thoughts are ever lasting.

-Slim, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have a great way with words. Do you write when you are on the outs? What do you get out of other's writings? Self-expression is important and so is your freedom. You've got talent. Now, all you need is discipline - you can succeed Slim. Peace. Beautiful piece.

If I Had Wings

If I had wings, I would never die
None of my friends and loved ones would not die
If I had wings I would never get sick
If I had wings people would smile at me when I walk
down the street
If I had wings my brother would not had died from a
bullet
If I had wings my mother would have never forgotten
about me
If I had wings the place where I lived would not have so
much greed, disrespect, hurt, and hopelessness
If I had wings I would open my people's eyes and show
them that you can get money without selling drugs
But that's only if I had wings.

-Smacks B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You DO have wings Greg! With this piece, you show us that your imagination can take you on soaring flights. You might not have saved your friends or loved one, but you can still save yourself from this lifestyle you call "the game." Fly away from the system once you are set free.

Sharky From Camp

I made it to Camp from up in the Hall! I don't plan on running or plan on causing trouble. I just want to complete some programs and go on with my life. Well, here is some more of what goes on in my mind.

My little brother ... still ten but even bigger — he has a cell phone. He is up to my neck, and he is more emotionally disturbed than I am! At the age of ten, he is already struggling. That is the age at which I started to hate my mother.

He won't speak to anyone about any of the issues he is having. He yelled at my grandmother — the one positive, loving woman in his life — when she asked to speak about how he feels towards my mother. To him, "My mother being drunk...." He sees it as normal, like that's how life is. He committed a violent act against my mother.

I can understand my brother's feelings and actions, but there is more going on in his head than he can understand. I need to get out to save my brother from turning into an angry, suppressed, volatile juvenile.

-Sharky, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know you understand because of the pieces you've already written, about yourself at the same age with your mother (while your younger brother watched without comprehension because he was so young). Now you've had some years to being to sort through your feelings (though to be sure, that process is far from over), and you feel desperate to be out there where can at least try to help your brother understand some of what's going on inside and outside his young mind. Yeah, he needs someone to talk to, but even if you were out, you can't make him talk about his feelings. So just keep working on yourself, your own comprehension and integration of some very, very disturbing memories (plus the on-going reality) of your mother's alcoholism. They say it's a family disease. And though you seem to have figured out a lot on your own, you might try going to a meeting of Adult Children of Alcoholics, which is a twelve-step fellowship completely independent of Alcoholics Anonymous, though it stands on the shoulders of that program of recovery.

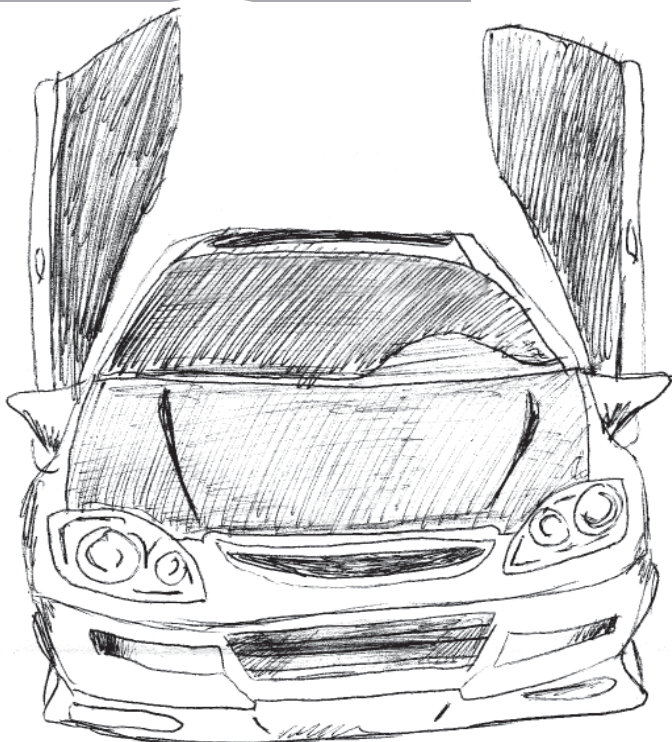


Blind

for yet again i have been blinded
covered up from what
but can't seem to say
took by without notice
delusional was intentional
for i have been doped
from feelings to being sensual
for yet again i have been blind
from whom i don't know
and have yet to know why
weeping noises in my ears
like a newborn baby's cry
for yet again i am blind
a mind with a slow leak
and bodily strength's ability
blindfolded from the world
which agitates and annoys me
what nourishes me
also hurts and destroys me
it's takin' me nowhere
fast and passively
losing sight for the better things
to curious from happily
for yet i am still blind
not able to move and very silent
still hearing the voice
of a newborn infant crying
for i am short for time
still losing focus
for yet i am still blind

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a complex and interesting poem, but coming from you, it's not surprising. There is a certain admission of ignorance essential to the fundamental task of starting over, even, as you make clear in your poem, a double admission. First, to recognize what you perhaps once thought you knew was in fact delusional and not true (intentional because escape from truth felt essential, too?), begins the process of coming new. All of that you cover in the past tense ("have been blinded" and "have been blind"), but then you recognize that you still are "yet again blind" (and "am still blind"), though in a new way. In the Gospel, when Jesus gives sight to the blind man, at first he sees without being able to focus. People seem to be stick-like figures of walking trees. Yet this blind is rather learning to see!



What I've Seen And Experienced

If I could start over tomorrow, I would change without a doubt. I'm not just saying that because I'm locked up right now — it's because of what I've been through and seen with my own eyes.

Some of the things I've been through, hit my body and soul harder than a Hurricane Katrina disaster! What I've seen and experienced at eleven years old, is me being handcuffed in the middle of the morning in my own home and shipped off across the country for fire-camp living in the boondock swamps of Mississippi where backwoods folks don't take a liking to a city slicker from the 'Dro (San Leandro) like me.

Those two years were purebred hell. I'd wake up each morning in the wee hours to eat warm cereal with sour milk. It made my bones shiver! And when I talked back, I'd get punched in my chops by boot-camp authorities. I was an eleven-year-old going on twelve, forced to learn how to survive by any means necessary.

This nightmare lasted for over two years with the people who I thought cared about me, showing no love. Birthdays and Christmases passed by as if each was just another day. I thought I'd see Santa Claus with my family wrapped in presents with an IOU letter attached to each one! But, of course, it was a no show.

Then, one day, I seen one of the other kids raping another kid in the tent. I was stuck in my mind. I basically forgot how to speak, to smile, to have fun. I basically lost myself. I then realized this was not for me — I had to get out! I couldn't shed a word to a soul as to what happened. I figured it was none of my business. I began to plot on a camp officer. I was going to beat him down. I proceeded to do just that. He was out for the count.

Then the word got out to the camp supervisor, and my city-slickin' self was on the first flight back to California. When I got back, there were no charges pressed on me. Yet my family showed no remorse and forgot about me like a fart in the wind — so I forgot about them like a dookie down the shhh-hole. And we kept it that way for many years.

But I've learned to become myself again, and I feel better knowing I got away. But right up to this day, it burns a hole in my mind. Peace out, Jesse aka ...

-Reese, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Whatever bad decision or series of bad decisions you made at the age of eleven, no eleven year old could possibly deserve or be prepared for what you witnessed and experienced at that boot camp in Mississippi. It's only natural that it has left an indelible mark in your memory, but the miracle that we want to celebrate is: "I've learned to become myself again." We know that self is a responsible young man with a compassionate heart, who is ready to do what is necessary to stay out of places like this for the rest of his life. We also know that addiction is an enemy that never sleeps, just waiting for any excuse to pull you back into its web of deceit and self-destruction (the deceit begins with lying to yourself, "just this once ...," etc.). So you've got the double-burden of a painful past, which feeds, into an addiction that promises escape but only takes you deeper into the pain in the end; but most addicts share this burden — and you can recover, one day at a time, clean and sober. Major props on who you've become, a young man ready to take his place in the sun!

Not Just Another Statistic

Man, if I could start over... I swear ninjas wouldn't even recognize me. I'd change my entire life around. I'd use all the lessons I've learned to walk an entirely different path. I would just stay concentrated on school and not be worried about what was goin' on on "the block." I mean, I got love for the block an' everybody who looked out for me, but to be real, the block ain't did shhh but mess my life up to this point.

I would make my grandmother proud of me an' stay focused on school and getting my education. A goal I would set for myself is to graduate from high school and go to college and make something of myself, so I won't just be another statistic.

-Young Quis B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The only thing we'd change about this piece is your verb tenses — we'd take out all those references to "would" and substitute "will." Because with the will, you can do from this point forward what you wish you had done back then. Keep that goal of graduating from high school and going to college, even if you don't keep another promise. Those accomplishments — which are well within your ability to achieve — will change everything for you. You know what we want for you. What do you want for yourself?

It's Been Four Years Since You Left

(RIP Critty-Bo)

C — is for careful

R — is for respect

I — is for important

T — is for thankful

T — is for thoughtful

Y — is for young

B — is for black

O — is for outstanding

Some people say he was this and some people say he was that, but many know what he really was. His real name is Christopher Fletcher. He was brought into this world December sixteenth, nineteen eighty-one. He was taken from me on March tenth, two thousand two — but he is not forgotten. Know that!

It's been four years since you left, and it ain't not one day that go' by that I don't think of you. But you know that I'm gon' keep it lit for us. I love you big brah. I dedicate this piece in loving memory of Christopher Fletcher aka Critty-Bo.

-Dada, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You were still a BG when your name first appeared in *The Beat* in several of the many stories in our pages about Critty-Bo (often also spelled as Criddy-Bo). He was greatly loved, as are you. And you know his spirit is watching over you. We believe he's trying to get a message through to you about taking a step back from the war in the street, so you don't have to end up deceased by its incessant heat. You've got street savvy, and if you add a higher wisdom, you could have a significant impact on the decisions of all the YG's who know you from the street. We've already seen Baby Lou swear to finish school because he heard it from you. You understand a lot about the block and how to maintain, but you haven't realized your power to do good in helping others rise above this murderous game. RIP Critty-Bo, help DaDa see a better way.

I Wouldn't Hesitate

Saludos, this is Joker from Newark. First and foremost I would like to start this "wila" out by sending my love to my familia and homeboys. Now to this topic at hand: "Fair Trade".

If there would ever come the opportunity for me to give my life or anything else, to be able to bring a family member or homeboy back to this world, I wouldn't hesitate to make that "fair trade". If giving my life for theirs wasn't enough, I would be willing to go on living the rest of my life righteously; and on top of that give up my life and live my eternal vida in hell, just to get one loved one back from their early dismissal.

That's a sacrifice I would be willing to make at any point in life. But since that opportunity may never come, all I can do is dream and reminisce on the memories I have in my heart of those firme loved ones that once were a big part of my life and now are a big part of my thoughts. Their loss has taught me to appreciate the presence of the familia that I still have, that still truly loves me and that is still holding me down on the outside, giving me all the motivation that I need to stay strong through these hard times.

The pain that I endure on the day-to-day basis from the loss of my homeboy, RIP Ali, will never go away, because my love for him is too strong. But I'm just gonna learn to live with it and keep him close to my heart till we meet in heaven (if there is a heaven). I end this by sending my best wishes to the ones that never gave up on me. Rest In Paradise Ali.

-Joker, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The love in this piece shines bright as the sun in a cloudless sky! Man, if only you could take this passion and harness it to a productive and socially beneficial life style — you couldn't bring homies back from the dead, as you say, but you could blaze a trail that could save the lives of homies close to your heart in the future. So many believe that it can't be done, that once you're in that life you can't get out. We're not saying you have to disrespect where you came from. On the contrary, live that righteous life and see just how much respect gets created in the hearts of the truly worthy. And you know your family would be proud, not to mention future children — do you really want your future sons to carry on this fatal tradition?

The Way I See It

by yo' self

and try not to be nobody else
i know it's hard when nobody love' you
and you all by yo'self
stand tall for what you know
and try yo' hardest to reach yo' goal
don't worry about what the next man say
or what the next woman know
you gotta keep yo' eye on the prize
and don't never turn yo' back to the door
and when yo' money get' short
keep yo'self lookin' good so nobody will know
you ain't gotta hate nobody
but you ain't gotta love all people
if you got to
stay by yo'self so the next man don't wanna be you
you gotta stay real militant
at night camouflage so nobody can see you
and don't let nobody take kindness for weakness
'cause then they gon' try to mistreat you
leave a good pay fo' the young ones
so the oh-gees will see you
don't let the next person get to yo' head
'cause then they gon' think they can beat you
so always keep yo' eye on the road
and keep yo' feet beneath the surface
and don't never say you can't do something
'cause if i ain't gon' out without a fight
then you can say my life warless

-Dada, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We have to confess we had trouble getting a couple of words right, and we apologize if we twisted the meaning. For example, your last word might be "worthless" but spelled "warless" gives it an interesting double-meaning — though from our POV without war (warless) is anything but worthless! However, it's clear that you begin with a vision of the street as a war zone, and you are here offering a "warrior's code" which you see as necessary for survival. We hoped during your stay in the Hall you'd rise to a higher vision of what's possible, but we recognize the pull of the street mentality, reinforced by the death of loved ones, appears to you as a given reality. We respect your voice but wish you could see that you do have another choice. Your charisma as a leader extends farther than what you're currently seeing. We wish you the best at the Y, and urge you not merely to "pimp your time" but to use it to educate your mind in school and get some job-training as a survival tool.

See Through My Soul

close your eyes and see through my soul
hear it cry out, and swift away in the cold
reach your hand out and tell yourself what it is you feel
a ghost, an angel, or ask yourself "is it real"
stare into the eyes of spirit, and tell me what you see
stare deep into his pupils, and see that his pain is not make-believe
only thing left for thy soul, is to stay close to my thoughts
get what was given and teach what was taught
open your eyes wider and see his hands are hard and his skin pale
everlasting spirit, that life never will fail
look into his hands and read my palms
read his life and see where he goes moments before dawn
close your eyes and see through my soul

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

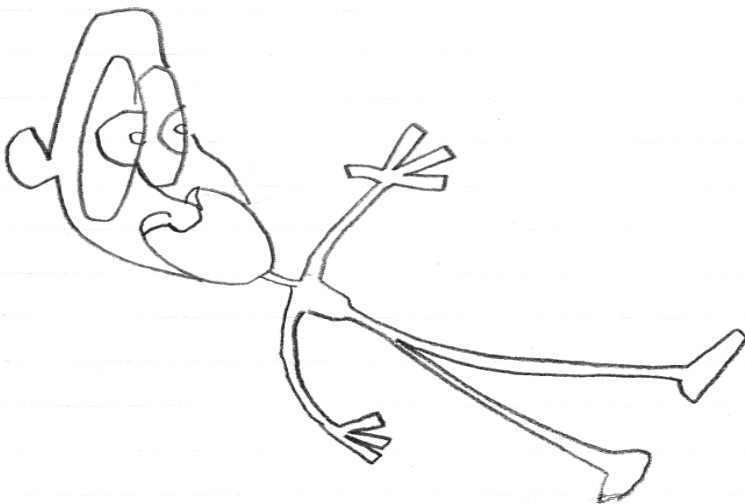
From The Beat: You take language from wherever you find it, from days of yore or from the street outside your own front door, and make poems wholly your own, original to the bone. You are an inspiration as a poet — in form, content and tone — and from your heart speak truth as you know it in poems that could be written by you alone. Sad, romantic, tragic, esoteric, arcane, keep writing your life in verse, and we'll be privileged to listen. Ya heard!

Victim

A victim, yeah
 I've been a victim
 Up in this BS system
 They don't understand
 Why my life is what it is
 So quit tryin' to understand it
 Givin' me time over time
 For little petty crimes
 I'm tired of this
 PO had bad day
 So in court
 The recommendation is
 For me to stay detained
 But got to put up with it
 Can't do nothing
 Just a gang banga
 To the judge and others
 Just another hard-hearted Latino brother
 Just takin' time from my life
 They go home
 While I'm at my bed
 Waiting for the light to go low
 I made myself this victim
 But at least
 Don't pretend to care and listen!
 Ask why I fight!
 Ask why I go through the hype!
 And then
 I bet you'll find I'm cursed
 Life or hearse
 A victim of the system
 And death

-Ryno LCRS, YGC

From The Beat: You say your life is cursed, and we guess you mean that there is a reality to how and where you live that you didn't create but which you are forced to deal with. We agree with you. But at the same time, we see that you have major skills that spring from a first-rate brain. You think deeply, you have insight — and you have a gift with words that let us into your world and your mind, even if just for a glimpse. These gifts (which should be a blessing to you, and not a curse) can be used to lead you away from the curse you describe. Yes, you're a victim, but at least partly of your own bad decisions. That's the part we hope you focus on, because that's the only part you can control. The system is messed up. The places we allow children to grow up in are messed up. Adult authority and the system is messed up. But none of that can be an excuse for your messing up where you have a choice not to. We can't pretend to know how we might adapt to the world you've been forced to adapt to, but even that doesn't matter. What does matter is your life, your freedom, and the wisdom you have that everyone of us can benefit from. We hope you find a way — if not out, then around and over. We need you.

**My Life**

My name is Charinthia and I am 12 years old and there are a lot of things I could have done to be doing better in my life. It all started when I started hanging around the wrong crowd. It started by stealing, then stealing led to smoking, and that led to having sex, and having sex led to hurting other people's girlfriends. I got in trouble and went to jail because when I started hanging out with older people it made me want to do older things like smoke. Then when I used to smoke and when I first got high I kept on talking to this dude, and he tried to talk to me and he told me some things that no one had ever told me.

I am now in juvenile hall for breaking my boyfriend's ex-girlfriend's window. I am planning to change my ways when I get out and I am not sitting in this room. I am going to start staying at home. And me running away is dead. I want my mom to love me again. I have been hurting her for the last few months, running away, staying out all night like I was grown. Now that I look at it, I am going to change my ways and in every way. I'm going to change my life anyhow. I am sorry, Mom. I really am.

-Charinthia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The good thing about being twelve is that you have so much time to grow and become the young woman that we know that you can be. It won't be easy to change, but it will be much easier now than if you wait until you're into your teen years or even older. We are glad to see that you are able to recognize the chain of events that led you to the Hall. Now that you see those relationships, what are you going to do differently? It's easy when you're locked up to say you're going to respect your mother when you get home, but when you get upset with your mother or you get tired of dealing with the situations at your house, what is going to make you stay there and not run away? Your mother probably knows more than you think, and she is thinking of your future when she tells you what she hopes you do and don't do. How do you plan to stop hurting her and yourself?

**Now that I look at it, I am
 going to change my ways
 and in every way.**

My Deepest Dedication

to you miss lady
 i give my deepest dedication
 wish you a lifetime of thanks
 peace and the best of relaxation
 to you i give and respect
 for bringing my only success
 i was like a bird that
 could not fly or leave his nest
 without you i would have still
 been in search for me
 but you taught me
 everything there is to know
 and opened my eyes wide to see
 it is of you who make a half-portion of me
 a part that makes me breathe
 felicity and raise to the woman
 who had a problem child to raise
 love respect joy
 are all the things for you that will never age
 to you motherly love i give my warmest dedications to
 to have the invaluable priceless and precious things
 that nothing material can buy

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: And among the invaluable trophies, the priceless items, the most precious of gifts, must stand this poem, so full of the love and respect the most deserving of mothers often fail to get from children who offer in return only neglect. Not so the mother of Lil' Jamar, who in this poem of praise and gratitude, shines like heaven's brightest star, her beatitude elevated far beyond time's reach, immortalized by this, his best poetical speech.

That Special One

There's always that special one that shows that she's dedicated
the one that waited
when them rippers were being anxious she was patient
and stayed in yo' corner and never faded or faked it
and tried her best not to leave you feelin frustrated
it's great to say it I love this woman like she's related
'cause she put some clothes in my closet when a ninja was
naked
now check it how many women do you know that's committed
the one that found out you cheated and bit her lip and stuck
wit' it
she loved you every time she see you she kiss you tell you she
miss you and every time you cried she gave you shoulders and
tissue
wrote you letters when you was caught up and doin' time
2 or 3 pages long sayin' baby you're on my mind
now I'm reminiscin' when them bollas rolled up she'll dis 'em
tryin' to spit they hardest game she told 'em she wouldn't listen
so that separated all the women from the children
if you look into my eyes girl you'll see what ya missin'
'cause when them hard times was kickin' that special one
wasn't disin' she was right there never missin' whisperin' she
wasn't leavin'
and you felt the pain 'cause you was in the game
she loved you hard and in return she begged you to do the same
but you was hard trippin' on the block
hard kickin' on yo' spot, hard slangin' bobs of rock everyday
and she was still there with the sexiest face
tryin' to show you a way, that's why she's special today

-Evans, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow, Evans, this is an epic poem of love. It tells the story of a young man torn between two loves — the love of another caring human being, and the love of the fast life and the game. It's a sad story because we know that you cannot serve two masters at the same time, and that having found a woman of this quality, you would risk losing it all for... for what? Whatever you did to be taken from her, you allowed the street life to become more important to you than she was, and now you are forced to write sad (but beautiful) love poems from behind four walls. We hope she is still there for you when you are again able to breathe the free air and exercise free will — and we hope that you use that free will to make the right choice.

Tired Of Not Being Known

Sure people know my name in here, and yes people know what crimes I've done, but I'm tired of not being known.

Some people know of me, and know where I'm from, but I'm seriously tired of not being really known. I'm gifted, talented, smart, an entrepreneur, but who else knows? I'm a minister of music, a song writer, a poet, but know one knows, which makes me frustrated, and frankly just tired of not being known.

I have my own group, my own band. I've made beats for FAB, but who knows?

I play the piano, organ, bass, and drums, play for churches, groups, major artists, and not so major, but know one knows in here.

The illegal things I've done cancels out all that in here. Now I'm just another juvenile delinquent, and it hurts, hurts not being known.

-T-Bone, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The point you are making here is vitally important. All the good works a person does, all the good things he or she stand for, all the accomplishments of a lifetime can be overlooked by making just one mistake. At the same time, we hope you can find a great deal of satisfaction in knowing your own accomplishments even if no one else knows or cares. What people think about you is less important than what you think about yourself, so take some justifiable pride in what you've done that's positive, and regret what you've done that's negative. When you get out, you can begin to re-establish the reputation you want through your actions.

If I Could Start Over...

If I could start over right now, I wouldn't. I say this simply because I don't like to live in the past. I don't like to think of things that aren't likely to happen.

I also say I wouldn't change my past because if I didn't make mistakes I've made I wouldn't be the person I am today. I feel I've really learned a lot from my experiences. I now know what not to do. Because I know if I keep doing the same things I've done in the past, I will keep getting the same results.

I wouldn't change my past if I had the opportunity. I'm just going to use my past to make a better future for myself. Mostly it's because I'm getting tired of this kind of life. And also because I don't want to end up dying without knowing how it feels to accomplish something and be successful.

-P, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The sign of a maturing young man is the realization that he is in control of his own actions, and that by continuing to do what brought negative consequences will only bring more negative consequences. In other words, by writing what you've written, we can see that you are no longer a child, but a young man going some place in life. Congratulations for opening your eyes and seeing what you have to do. What do you want to accomplish in life? How will you do it?

My Life Is Important

My life is important

I been through many things.

Since I smoke weed life change

I hang too much on streets

Thugs I see

Thug — I see myself

Is like saying kill me

Or I'll kill you first.

Too much violence.

Violence, I make my choice

I'm the only who could stop

But there's too much haters in the world

I'll stop 'cause I started this on my own

Before someone kills me

My life is important

I always wanted to be rich

Have a nice life with fancy cars, houses

And be a businessman.

My life is important

But I'll be no punk

-Wero B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We agree with everything in this tight but sad poem, Wero. You are the only one who can make the choices that will keep you safely out of the system and safely out of hospitals (or the morgue). We understand why you want all those nice things... who doesn't? But we want to encourage you to take the slow and steady approach instead of the fast but dangerous path you've chosen — and which has led you here! It's interesting about not being a punk. Again, we understand what you mean and why you say it, but what if being "a punk" (by your definition) gave you the riches, the cars, the houses, the business and the life that you crave?

How It Happened

This life style of violence was once the only answer,
trying to climb up that social ladder,
pumping fear into anyone who finds such a life a waste,
trying to replace the family one never had
with a group of friends the same as you.

-Anibal, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: You've said so much in so few words. Terrific writing.

Five Year Max

Well Beat. I finally got my disposition and the judge game me a five year max sentence at California Youth Authority. I'm not trippin' too hard off it, I knew I was getting it. It just seems harder to finally hear it, I wasn't expecting to have a five year max but the DA was hatin' on me real hard, talking about how he wants me to do twenty years. Ain't that some BS. Considering what the DA thought it should be, I guess I am lucky. I sure as hell don't feel lucky though.

I guess to some of y'all readin' this, a five-year-max might seem like a walk in the park. Not to me though, especially because this is the first time I have gotten arrested. I don't know what to expect. I just hope that I can turn this into a lesson that I won't forget. I've heard that there are vocational schools so I can learn a trade while air m there and I can also get my high school diploma.

I know I couldn't get that on the outs, there was just too many distractions. I always wanted to go to an auto shop class, maybe I would be able to there. I guess I don't have anything to complain about. Like the judge said, it's not like someone held a gun to my head and made me do it. I'm here because I made the decision to break the law. I do regret doing what I did but regret won't make the doors swing open. I realize it's gonna be hard, changing for the better, just because most of society makes it hard to do.

I think I'm ready to step up the plate and change. Truthfully I can't wait to see how much I've changed once the system says that they are finally ready to say I am rehabilitated and ready for my release into the world. The first day of the rest of my life.

Or so they say in the movies.

-Shotgun, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When we read this, we're struck by the difficulty you have to face and the conflicted feelings of disappointment and hope that you're expressing, but we also can't help but be struck by how much you're writing style has changed over the past year. You've always written clearly and well, but now it's like there's a poetry to it, and to your images, that shows you're confidence and skills blowing up. Look at these images, the way they pile up on each other: Regret won't make the doors swing open. Or even the way you write "Regret don't make the doors swing open." Or the way you end on that ironic statement about the movies. You're also developing your own style and voice. Whatever you decide to do to use these next few years well, that this newfound gift of yours is a real gift: something you can turn to for strength while you handle your new situation.

Heart To Heart

I remember many times I shared a wonderful heart to heart conversation with my mother, but no one really sticks it out. We were both sitting in her bedroom watching TV and we just simply started talking.

All my life I have been able to say anything to my mother. We've always had an open relationship. We started talking about relationships, and for most teenage girls, they cannot talk about that type of thing with their moms. It came out quite easily with me. So my mother and I just talked and talked for hours.

When we stopped to get something to eat, I felt so good to be able to say all the things I said and not feel weird about it afterward. It felt good to be able to get those things off my chest and confide them to my mother.

I suggest to everyone to tell your mom anything - even if you feel weird about it. You will feel better that you can tell her, and she will feel great that you told her.

-Sara, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: This is a wonderful piece Sara. And here's something else, along the same lines. When you don't have someone who will lend you an ear and you need to get things off your chest, pick up a pencil and start writing. It's the next best thing to talking with someone you trust. And you will feel better after 'words'.

My Life

Can you take me back to when I was ten years old? I would have changed a lot of things, like I would not have been in jail. Well my years are gone and mommy, I am truly sorry and will change.

It is about 6:00 and I am in my room waiting to go visit Allan and I hope I don't cry.

I am really looking forward to seeing my mom on Saturday. I am going to tell her how sorry I am and give her these letters. My mom is a special person.

Now that I think about it I should have just been at home and maybe I would not be in this place. I just can't wait 'till I get my second chance.

I've been here for about three weeks and I cry almost everyday 'cause I think about how I used to treat my mom. I say used to 'cause that is the past and I am not going to treat her like that anymore.

I hope she will give me a second chance. I am not like anyone else when I get out. I won't be back. I am serious. I am not going to smoke because if I smoke that would be violating my probation and that is a way to be back in here. To tell you the truth I would rather be at home washing dishes than just being in jail. Now that I think about it that was fun 'cause in here I can't even clean up all I do is sleep, read and cry 'cause that is the only thing I can do in here.

When I be at school I be so glad to be out this little room. Life is a bummer, because if it wasn't I would not be in here. When I get out I want to go to school out of Oakland 'cause Oakland is too rough for me and I am going to mess around and hurt one of the girls out here.

I want to be where there are white people and I promise myself that I am going to get straight A's not even any B's. I am gonna to get A's and if I do that I probably can do whatever I want 'cause I can say at least I did something good today. I went to school and got an A on something than I can have fun 'cause I can say at least I went to school so now I can have a little fun.

-Nunew, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Mothers are very special people. Our mothers do things for us that no other person would do. The many sacrifices that they make for our happiness and security demonstrate how much they love us. But while I am sure that your mother wants you to change, you have to change for you. It's very easy to make all of these promises to yourself about things that you want to do differently and to feel sorry for yourself, but how are you really going to make these changes become real for you? One thing that you mention is going to a different school with white people. Being around white people won't ensure your success. There are just as many white schools that could impact you in the same way as the schools that you attend now. Sometimes people think that whiter means better, but that's not true. You may find that being in a school with people who look like you and teachers who have the resources to truly educate you would be the best school for you.

Like the judge said, it's
not like someone held
a gun to my head and
made me do it. I'm here
because I made the
decision to break the law.

Why

Why they screw me,
 Why everyone be hatin' on me
 Do they don't like what they see,
 That's too bad they're not me,
 Why you got to talk shhh behind my back,
 You bad enough to say it to yo' so-called friends,
 Then you bad enough to say it to my face,
 Why, why so negative
 Why, why so cruel
 Why, why so wrong
 And why you got to do
 Why is it because you want attention
 Or is it you want to put in a laugh
 Why, tho'
 Why, people mean to people they don't even know
 You should open my doors and see what you know
 Why, because I just might be a coo' person
 Why, maybe I'm yo' cousin and you don't even know
 It's because you think you know everything
 Why, you got to call people out they name
 Why, did you know people who talk shhh
 Are not happy with themselves did you know that,
 They think they bad enough but when it come down to it,
 It's a different show.
 Why, but it's okay 'cause god gon' get me through
 This day and the next day.
 Why me, females been hatin' since I was 8
 Why, me
 Is it because my parents getting paid
 You see me walking in them Jays
 Why, me,
 Me and my sister been through a lot 'till this day
 Just 'cause we get what we want don't mean it's okay
 Why, me
 I look at these four walls and say, "Damn w'at a day!"
 Praying to myself that it's gone be okay
 Why, me
 Everywhere you go you gone find negative
 Everywhere you look its negative
 Why, me
 Why people want to fight me,
 And then call the police.
 Why me, say I hit them first,
 And then I go to jail,
 Why me,
 If people really got to know the real me
 Then there wouldn't be no more
 Why me?

-Ja' Laya, 150 Crew

From The Beat: 'Why me' is always a good question to ask. Have you come up with any answers? Why do you think people are hating on you so much? What do have that they want? Did you do anything to contribute to their feelings? Do you feel like you put yourself in situations that force you to question 'why me'? We believe that there's always someone worse off in any situation we find ourselves, and although knowing that doesn't usually help us, it's worth thinking about. What do you think?

I Want A Visit

Here it is the weekend and I have not heard from my mom and grandma, which means they freaking lied! Ooh I can't wait to get out of this freaking place so I won't have to worry about being lied to. I hope they come on freaking Wednesday 'cause if they don't I am going to have a freaking attitude. This is not freaking fair! Me not getting a visit, man, if I could use the phone, I would probably tell them some things I will regret. But this is hella messed up. I am sitting here crying 'cause they lied. They should have been straight up and said they wasn't coming 'cause now it is the end of visiting and I am crying.

Man, this shhh ain't fair. This really hurt my feelings but they don't give a damn. All they care about is them getting revenge. But when I get out, oh boy y'all don't know what's going to get revenge. See they making me think like this 'cause they lied.

I feel very angry and it makes me want to go crazy, but it makes me feel better when I write this down. Man I am so freaking pissed! It is not even funny well here goes another messed up weekend.

Oh but I do love and miss my mom. I feel better. I do feel better. My mom is just trying to teach me a lesson and I don't blame her. She just wants what's best for me and I really want her to know I am really sorry.

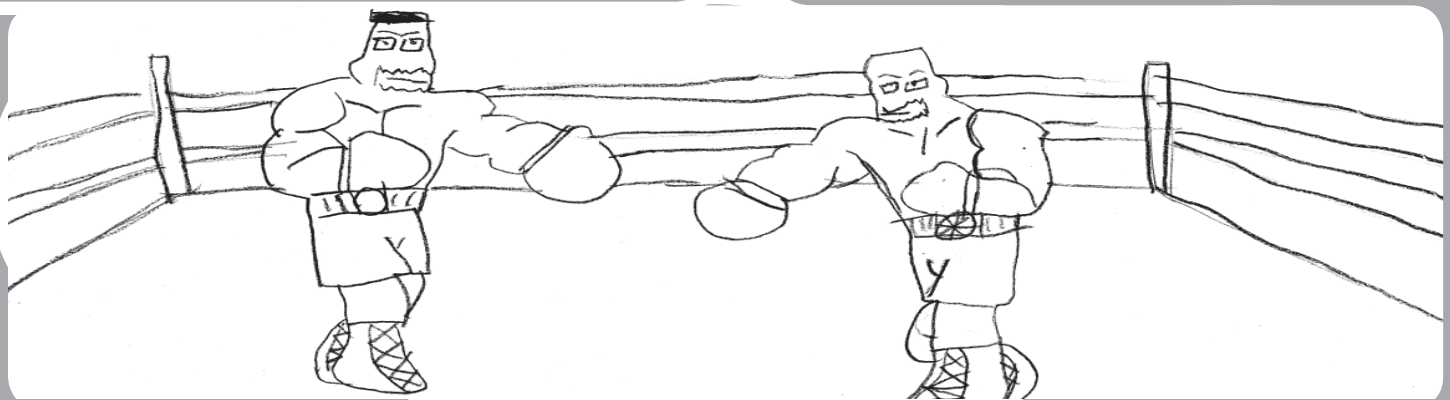
Just before I left some one had told her I was snorting powder which was not true. The only thing I was doing was smoking weed and cigarettes and selling weed and that was all. When I get out I am not going to smoke weed 'cause if I have a dirty pee test I am coming back to jail.

But this is what I am thinking of doing. No, as a matter of fact, what I am going to do is I am going to smoke one last blunt and one last pack of cigarettes and turn to the Lord. This is how I am going to do it. I get out on Thursday. Thursday I am going to spend time with my family. Friday I am going to go get the cigarettes and the weed. I will smoke cigarettes and go smoke the blunt and on Sunday I am going to give my life to the Lord and go to church every Sunday until I die, even if I am sick I am going to go. My mom probably won't like it, but this is how I am going to change my life and God please stick with me.

I am not even going to be all wild anymore and I am going to tell my boyfriend that if he can't come to church with me than screw him and he is just like my habits and I am going to quit him.

-Nunew, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you think that Friday will be the last time that you smoke a cigarette or blunt, you are sadly mistaken. What's going to be the change that you are making between Friday, Saturday and Sunday? YOU have to change you. It's just not going to fall out of the sky. If you are serious about making some changes, you have to devise a better plan. Getting out and smoking, which will land you right back in here, doesn't sound like a good plan. Just going to church is not going to solve your problems either. How will your faith be an extension of the decisions that you have made on the inside? What's your plan B? (Just in case the plan you outlined doesn't work.)



On A Sunday Porch

Staring into the intersection
She thinks that she can fly
And she might, take it a new direction
She gonna try it tonight
The closer I get to feeling,
Further that I'm feeling from all right
The more I step into the sun
The more I step out of the light
Jessica's covered in a blanket
On a Sunday porch
Thinking of weekends
She would party in the city
She doesn't have a flame
She'd prefer to burn out like a torch
If she gets nowhere in life at least
She knows she's pretty
The moon is shining now
And shadows are what's left
Of all the noise
Simple silhouettes and cutouts
As if we had a choice
She listens slowly now
She can hear a voice that's calling her.

-Noah, 150 Crew

From The Beat: 'On A Sunday Porch' sounds so soothing, yet the girl you speak of seems to have thoughts that are putting her on edge. Who is the voice that's calling her? The mystery of your poetry intrigues us. It's sad that some of us only have our physical appearance to be proud of. What would go through your head if you

Last Breath

Hold on to me love
You know I can't stay long
All I wanted to say was
I love you, and I'm not afraid
Can you feel me in your arms
Holding my last breath
Safe inside myself
Around my thoughts of you
Sweet rapture life
It ends here tonight
I'll miss the winter
A world of fragile beings
Look for me in the white forest
Kidding in hallowed tree
I know you hear me
I can taste it in my dreams
Holding my last breath
Safe inside myself around my thoughts of you
Sweet raptured life it ends here tonight
Closing your eyes to disappear
You pray your dreams will leave you here
But still you wake and know the truth
None's there,
Sacred night, don't be afraid
Calling me
Calling me into faith tonight
Holding my last breath.

-Noah, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is an amazing, and very mysterious poem. Are you holding your last breath for fear of what might happen if you exhaled? Or are you holding your breath because you don't want the moment to end? Your brain, when captured on paper, is such an incredible thing. So, how are you exercising it?

Victimized

People have always told me be careful who you kick it with at a party. I've heard it many times, but now I know why they say it.

I was chilling with some tight people at a party, you know, drinking while I was yakked out of my mind. Some guy who was decent looking came up to me and started talking. Well, I trusted him. Then he said he had G in another room and asked if I wanted to go do a line. Be real, you know you would say yeah to that bomb offer.

So I agreed and went into the room where he shoved me on the bed. I asked what the hell he was doing and he proceeded to take off my jeans. I was unsure if he was going all the way or what, and yeah he did. When he was finished I was sobering up, crying, shaking. It was hell. He got up and left and I found my friend and he took me home.

-Unknown Name, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Some lessons are learned at a tremendous cost. Is this the end of the story? Did you tell the authorities what happened? Did you confront him? Did you tell friends about it? Did anything happen to him at all? One of the reasons men think they can commit this crime (which is a felony, a strike) is that too often they face no consequences for it. They count on the girl being so humiliated or disgraced that she won't talk about it. We think that's just wrong, and that the only way to stop men like this (and they're really stunted boys in men's bodies) is to bring their crimes to the light of day. We're sorry you had to experience this assault.

Some guy who was decent looking
came up to me and started talking.
Well, I trusted him.

I Would Live Life Bolder

if i could start over
i would live life bolder
and not be influenced
by the burdens on my shoulders
it's too bad i'm realizing this
only as i get older
'cause life is getting
harder and colder
for people who used to
live life on the border
to be even a little good in life
you have to have some order
and don't step beyond
the point of no return
'cause there will be someone
waiting with a bigger boulder

-Dopey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Is there really a point of no return? Maybe if you've killed someone, and you're being hunted with a gun; but even then it's exactly as you say, a "harder and colder" world greets you each day. We maintain it's never too late to start living right, but the more dirt you do, the harder you have to fight the influence of fear — 'cause it just gets you in deeper till you reach six feet or gets you locked in here or CYA or jail or in some penitentiary where they throw away the key. So thank God you now have eyes to see a better way that will lead you to a brand new day.



realize if you keep
smoking you gon'
end up sleeping in
some parvk

What My Freedom Worth

My freedom is worth cutting my dreads
My freedom is worth all my dough
My freedom is worth fighting for
My freedom is worth givin' the fast life up
My freedom is worth a million dollars
My freedom is worth a lot
So why did I give it up?

-Charter, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Excellent question! Your freedom is priceless. Once you regain it, never lose it again!



Love

love is like loving you everyday
love is just the same words you say
love is like loving you in the bed
loving my thoughts is what i just said
boo i love you until the day i die
i love you but i love my family even more
like i love you inside
if i left this world i'd love you even more
come back i love you the same way baby girl
i love you so much i can't deny
god gave you this gift and that's no lie
it feels so good it makes me wanna cry
i got so much love for you
i love you so much i'll just make you my god-lovin' charm
like lil' ma said love yo' friend like yo' girl
i'm a love you until the day i die but before i die
let me tell you my feelings that i feel for you inside
my love to you is — i care
my love to show you i will always be there

-Lil' Ant, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've got a way with words when it comes to professing your love to your girl or to your friend or to your family you'll love to the end. If you really want to follow through on your promise to always be there, then you need to change the way you live your life, less thug and more square — a square thug is what you need to do, is you want to prove your love is true.

Realize

realize this ain't no game
realize what you say will always remain
realize when you come to jail it ain't cool
realize when you get out you gotta go to school
realize one day you will become a man
realize what you say must stand
realize one day you gonna be in the grave
realize you thought you would stay in that shade
realize one day you will have kids
realize one day you will have to do for your kids
realize when bullets start flyin' it thinks about killing
realize some people are smart
realize if you keep smoking you gon' end up sleeping in
some park
realize some people gon' be on crack or heroin sleeping
in the dark
realize and get yo' life together before it's too late
get yo' life together or you will be asking god for a break

-Lil' Ant, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Now out of all this good advice, are you going to be looking only for those two or three lines we cut? If that's true, it's probably why we cut them, too. Not to make you mad, but because those lines said what you most wanted to say — and it's not okay in The Beat, but more importantly it's not safe for you or anyone else on the street. If you can't feel, we hope God will reveal; 'cause so much of what you write here is good and honest and clear. Can you live it?

Crime Spree

What drew me to crime was a bunch of different things. Drugs got me going crazy, not thinking straight. Then I was doing some stupid stuff. Another reason for doing crimes was because in my head I thought it would earn me respect, which it did. I also did it for the skilla.

-Lil' Mike, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: It depends on whose respect you want, doesn't it? And the money you put in your pocket from crimes ends up costing a lot more, doesn't it? So it's not a good deal, any way you look at it, is it?

Me Arrepiento Haber Regresado

Pasando un mal rato encerrado de vuelta. Esta es mi tercera vez que estoy encerrado en la juvenil de San Francisco. Me arrepiento por haber regresado pero al mismo tiempo me pongo a dar gracias a Dios por lo que ha pasado en mi vida. Si el quiso que regresara es porque algo malo me hubiera pasado allá afuera.

Doy gracias a Dios porque me dio un día más de vida. Le pido que me de mucho más para regresar a mi país donde pueda volver a ver a mi familia que hace dos años y medio no los he vuelto a ver.

Extraño mucho a mi mamá, a mi hermanita y a toda mi familia en especial a todos mis amigos, pero no me preocupo. Siempre le pido a Dios que me de fuerzas para seguir adelante y como siempre he dicho, algún día voy a salir de esta prisión.

Un Saludo a todos mi raza encerrada.

From The Beat: Quien sabe lo que te hubiera pasado afuera. Tienes que tomar esta experiencia como un aviso que si sigues en este mismo camino, vas a terminar muy mal. Todavía tienes la vida para vivirla de la manera como debe de ser vivida, no dejes que nadie te la quite o la desperdices en lugares como esto. Esperamos que Dios te escuche y te de la sabiduría que necesitas para seguir adelante y no caer en malas tentaciones. Cuida tu vida amigo y lo que pertenece a tu vida. ¿Ahora que ya sabes esto, que vas a hacer?

I Regret Having Come Back

I'm having a bad time, locked up once again. This is my third time being locked up in Juvenile Hall in San Francisco. I regret having come back, but at the same time, I start to give thanks to God for what has happened in my life. If He wanted me to come back, it's because something bad would have happened to me on the outs.

I give thanks to God because He gave me one more day to live. I pray to Him to give me many more so I can go back to my country where I will be able to see my family because it has been two years and a half since the last time I saw them.

I miss my mother, my sister, and all my family very much, especially all my friends, but I'm not worried. I always ask God to give me the strength to continue forward and like I've always said, one day I'm going to get out of this prison. A shout-out goes out to my Latin people locked up.

-Pinpy B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Who knows what would have happened to you on the outs. You have to take this experience as fair warning that if you continue going down this same path, you're going end up very bad. You still have life to live it the way it should be lived. Don't let anyone take it from you or let it go to waste in places like this one. We hope that God listens to you and gives you the wisdom that you need in order to continue forward and not fall into the hands of bad temptations. Take care of your life friend and everything that pertains to your life. Now that you know this, what are you going to do?

**AVECES tú crees que tu estas
preparado. Te sientes listo
pero se te ha olvidado,
que la vida traiciona de vez
en cuando**

Mi Cansión

La luz para ceder me apuraba y el destino esta preso pero ahora entiendo todas las señales. No quiero impactarme con la vida.

A veces tú crees que tu estas preparado. Te sientes listo pero se te ha olvidado, que la vida traiciona de vez en cuando. Para mí no fue facil salir aquella tarde, dar vuelta en tinieblas que querían arrojarme, pero mi corazón nunca dejo de latir mientras muchos resaban por mi para que yo no muriera. A mi Dios le pedilla que cantar yo quería.

From The Beat: ¿Y a ti te ha traicionado la vida? ¿Como? ¿Que te pasó en esa tarde? Disculpanos si estamos equivocado, pero con lo último de esta redacción, podemos entender que estuviste entre la vida y la muerte. ¿Si fuera así, nos podrias contar lo que sucedido con palabras? Si esto pasó, deberias de agradecer a Dios por esta gran oportunidad que te ha brindado en seguir viviendo.

My Song

The light to surrender would rush me and destiny is locked up, but now I understand the signs. I don't want to have an impact with life.

Sometimes you feel that you are prepared. You feel ready, but you have forgotten that life betrays you every now and then. For me, it was not easy to get out that afternoon and do circles in darkness that wanted to encircle me, but my heart never stopped beating, while many prayed for me so I wouldn't die. I begged to my God that I wanted to sing.

-Jonathan, LCRS

From The Beat: And has life ever betrayed you? How? What happened to you that afternoon? Forgive us if we are confused, but based on the last lines of your piece, we can understand that you were between life and death. If that was the case, could you tell us what happened in words? If this happened, you should be thankful to God for this huge opportunity that he has afforded you in continuing to live.

My Parents Drew Me To Crime

What drew me to crime was the fact that my parents got divorced in September of 2005. That upset me because I wasn't able to see my dad anymore, at least for a while. I only got to see him every couple of months. So I'm pretty sure I committed my crimes to get the things that I normally would if my dad was around.

-Nick, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: And now you know that that's not the way to get what you need. We hope you've been able to see your dad. And we hope you've learned from your mistakes. It's for sure that no kid can control the lives of his parents. But he can control his own behavior. You know what you have to do. Just do it.

Cliché Advice

Slow and steady wins the race

If you aren't embarrassed, then why the red face?

Show your true colors and be a man

Don't be afraid to get up and take a stand

It's harder than you think to be honest and true
So, please don't bite off more than you can chew

Take your time and always think before you act

'Cause life only gets harder, and that's a fact

One day at a time will get you through

You respect me and I'll respect you

Absence only makes the heart grow fonder

Pain builds character; it'll make you stronger

-Scorpion, Marin

From The Beat: And don't forget that every cloud has a silver lining, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, you only get out what you put in, what goes around comes around, God don't like ugly — and, one of our all-time favorites: it ain't nothin' to a boss! We love your wit, among other things we love about you...

My Family Drew Me to Crime

What I think drew me to crime, was my family. Ever since I was small, I was taught it was okay to steal, lie and get over on people.

My family is made up of hustlers and murderers — not that I'm proud, but it's what I was raised in. I have more than seven uncles in prison. My dad has spent a combined twenty-three years in prison. I don't think I ever did choose to live this life on purpose — it kinda just happened.

Well, I'm trying to get myself out of this messed-up situation as best as I can. I'm stuck here at Camp; it's nothing fun. Well, I'm already halfway through my program here, and I'm still the strongest up here! If you're in the Hall or locked up anywhere else, keep your head up. Be strong and think positive. Much love and respect. Until next time, Garza aka ...

-Malo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We have always respected the way you come with the truth, the facts as they are, what's real. No, you didn't choose the way of life you've been living, just as you say, your born into it when you were born into your family. But you don't have to judge them to see that this life will take you nowhere you want to be. It is not easy to be the first in your family to break free from your family history, but do it and you will start a new line — so your kids won't be stuck somewhere doing time, realizing they never did choose a life of crime, but it was all they ever knew. It's not easy, but hey, you're the strongest one at Camp, dude! When you start to get fed up with all that led up to your doing time, keep your head up — and quit your life of crime.

My dad has spent a combined twenty-three years in prison. I don't think I ever did choose to live this life on purpose — it kinda just happened.

I Hate The World

I'm not sure what to write, though I keep moving this pen
Every week I write and hope my problems will mend
I don't have normal thoughts because, well, I don't know
And that's just another problem making my frustration grow
Some people call me kind, and others, not nice words
Every step into my life feels like it's going to the birds
I'm going to Mesilla, NM, to get a fresh start
Hoping I really can start fresh and that my inhibitions will part
I'm running away from my problems as an outlet
Because, dealing with them, hasn't worked yet
I have twenty dollars and the clothes on my back
And these people wanna talk therapy shhh, forget that
They don't know what it's like to feel hated
Because of one action, eternally discriminated
Can't get a job for fear of harassment
Everybody is wondering where my money is spent
Is he buying sex toys or adult videos?
It's not your business, but I'll tell you, no!
I feel like nobody understands who I am
That they don't even want to try to understand
They look at my records and start to judge
I try to explain, but their thoughts just won't budge
I hate the world and I don't even know 'em
But they don't know me, so it's fair; I'm done with this poem

-Scorpion, Marin

From The Beat: It's interesting that you complain that "nobody understands who I am," while also admitting that you don't understand your own thoughts (which you describe as "not normal.") If therapy isn't working for you, that doesn't mean that it can't work for you. Maybe in the mutual attempt (between a therapist you trust and yourself), both will come to a better understanding of who you are and why you did and do what you do. We're not at all interested in whether you buy sex toys and videos, or really whatever you do with your money. But we are very interested in you exploring as much of yourself as you can, because it is so obvious to us that you are possessed of some extraordinary gifts — gifts of reason and intelligence that all of us can benefit from. Running away might be the best thing you can do for the time being. But in the end, you'll still be you, and you are very much worthy of understanding.

Changing The Route Of My Predicted Fate

I mentioned what keeps me in the streets — crime life, which is the action that's always there. I do what I do for a living as a youngsta. It used to be a habit for me — disrespecting people's property and personal space. The dope life never fitted me, and I'm talking 'bout selling and using. I found it a lot better robbing and stealing.

I never needed drugs to push me beyond my limits to get my money, 'cause I be on a natural high when adrenalin is in me. I came up from a rough family and instead of using and sex, I did what I do best to get my anger out — and I got paid for it!

When I first got locked up in juvenile hall, I had nothing to do but sit in that quiet cell in RU, alone with myself. I seen what could happen to me if I kept on going, plus, I already had life-threatening altercations with some of my hits.

I've seen people in my life who lost their thoughts for doing the things I do, but it's always that demon in us who make us say, "I ain't worried. That'll never happen to me." You have to be aware and accept that if you plan to keep going.

-Aware LCRS, YGC

From The Beat: Since you've already had your life threatened, will that be enough of a warning to get you to stop robbing and stealing? We can tell by how well you write that you have skills you could capitalize on to make a decent living the legit way. Of course, you need a basic foundation that school provides. You've used your good brain to look into the future and predict the negative consequences that will come your way if you keep doing what you've been doing. Will that be enough to make you change? For your sake, we hope so.

Ain't No Grass

My thoughts are recidivating back to last year's mindset
An avalanche of feelings; say "yeah" if you feel that
Back to smokin' and drinkin', and feeling kinda numb
Back to the streets, my home; back to having some fun
I've gained some and lost some in this race for knowledge
But because of my past, I'm never going to college
I apologize if you think my actions are too rash
But I've been to the other side of the fence
It's an illusion; there ain't no grass

-Scorpion, Marin

From The Beat: If there's anything we disagree with you in this sad but meaningful poem, it is the line that says "because of my past, I'm never going to college." College is much more than a place, it is a process, and it is available even to those on death row! So even though we know you have a first-class mind, we definitely expect you to continue to expand your knowledge. One of the ways you'll do that (but only one), is through formal and informal education. Through your mind you can leap over the walls! Cultivate the grass that grows within you.

What Brings Me To The Life Of Crime

Man... everything! The cash money, the cars, the popularity, the females, just the feeling and rush you get. There's three things every hustla loves wit' a passion — money, power, and respect. First, you hustle, get the money. Then comes the power 'cause money make the world go 'round. Once you got both of those, then comes the respect. I'ma hustla, so dat's why I'm constantly being sucked into the life of crime.

-Young Quis B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thanks for putting it down so directly, Young Quis. How many of those on their path to respect end up mostly forgotten in prison or underground? Experience should tell you that before, after and in between steps one, two and three, comes periods of time that you give your body up to strangers, like a slave of old. It's just more than we'd be willing to risk.

My Life Of Crime

What's up Beat?! What draws me to a life of crime is the adrenaline rush. I would say I like to play with fire as most people has told me. I look like a harmless person, but if I am with the friends, there can be chaos.

But you know what, I have changed my ways. I am not going to resort to a life of crime anymore. I have found it to be boring just doing the same stuff over and over again. I have done enough to waste a good one year of my life due to incarceration. Now, nothing will back that one year. I don't regret most of the things that I've done, but I regret the ones that I got caught for.

But I'm slowly rehabilitating. So that's it for me. Peace...

-Rehabilitating Minor B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have come to a point in life where you are thinking out of the small box you were in. You have realized that the time you wasted is not worth it and that you can do better things in life — all of which require some preparation which has to begin some time. We hope the time is now for you, because it sounds like you already know what you need to know. Keep up the good work, and remember, change takes time, for all of us. By the way, we're always curious about the "adrenaline rush" theory of why you do some things. Couldn't you get an adrenaline rush from handling snakes or spiders, or rock climbing, jumping off of bridges attached to a rubber band, or just playing sports?

What Pulls Me To A Life Of Crime

Personally, what I think draws me into a life of crime is to get what I need and use that to get what I want. For example, I not one of them type dudes with the fancy outfits, wit' the new white crispy tees on and nice shoes and shhh. So obviously I don't get a lot of money or even any at all. Plus I'm not in the position to get a job 'cause I'm constantly focused on going to a required drug programs and community services that the judge required me to do. Plus I got school on the side.

So I get what I need, mostly money, I got to take it. I can't take that chance to sell drugs 'cause I might get robbed or arrested. So I got to be on the low. That's a messed up feeling when you know you the only ninja on the streets who got to wear the same-ass shhh every day. I done wore that same shhh for so many months my pants all ripped up in the back, a big gash in the front, my shirt got bleach stains on it. And most of that shhh I wear everyday is hand-me-downs from my bra.

I don't have no choice but to take what I need 'cause that's the only way I could get it. Ain't nobody gon't give it to me. I look at it like, "Why not?" But most of the time I be scared to rob and steal 'cause I be afraid I might get caught. So any time I do, I don't get shhh but 5 to 20 measly-ass dollars that I can only use for lunch for the week or so. So basically, my life ain't shhh. At least when I'm locked up I get to eat more and get more exercise.

-J.R. B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your final sentence is one of the biggest indictments against the society we live in have seen in The Beat. It is our crime that any child or young person should have to come to jail to get a decent meal and exercise! We don't know if you are truly without choices or not, but it is clear that at the very least your choices are severely limited. All we can say is that when you ask yourself that question, "Why not?" you really start listing some answers. You've started here with the fact that you're risking a lot for a little. But what other answers could you give to why not? The fact that you write so well suggests to us that you might be able to use your intelligence to find some alternative ways to get better clothes, for example, that don't involve robbing people.

But me I close my eyes
Ta feel the peace of my dreams
It's when I open them I
experience
A nightmare

Give Up To Get Back

I'd sacrifice a life o' crime
To hold my own
To raise my kin
Livin' life on the edge
Close ta death
Ain't physically dead
Soul was gone
Mental monitor beeps ceasin'
Only way to win
Is if I change
On my hustle type
Tryin' ta get my money right
But slowly takin' others lives
Fast cash untaxed
Can't fulfill my dreams
See some fear to close they eyes
Due to nightmares
But me I close my eyes
Ta feel the peace of my dreams
It's when I open them I experience
A nightmare
I'm so used to it now
I don't quit care
But if I don't change that thinking
I'll be stuck here
On my own so I gotta
Find strength
Stuck in a dark hole
But I'll climb that ladder
No matter how high
I'll find my way
I'm dedicated ta change

-D-Smirk B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Wow! This a deep piece of work and well thought out. Your words shows that you are aware of where you want go as well as the obstacles that will be in your way. But unfortunately, at the same time, your actions undermine your words... How does your "dedication to change" actually work? We thought you were on the right path for what you're seeking, and then you did what you did in the unit! Why? Who will pay the price for this? What does this tell you (and us) about how much change you're willing to undertake? Of course we hope that you continue to search for better days, but even more we hope that you apply yourself do to what you already know will bring you greater rewards in due time. We always look forward to your writing, but we hope it's more than mere words...

That's Why

That's why I'm in here
I understand now that's why
I could've got killed, that's why
I guess it works out for itself, that's why
Sometimes id don't work, that's why
Can't you see, it's a set up, that's why
You keep comin' back to YGC, that's why
Why you sendin' you out of state, that's why
Why these suckas wanna hate, that's why
That's why yo' ass in here
Yo' folder getting' bigger, they pockets
getting' bigger
Off our dumb ass
That's the truth

-Goo B B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Whether it works out or doesn't is largely in your hands. What's past can't be undone. But the future isn't written until you write it. You're right, the system can be a terrible set, a trap waiting to be sprung. But you're also right that you have to be smarter than the system and the only way to do that is to stay out of it.

Another Chance, At Camp

In the place called Camp Sweeney, you could get another chance to do better for yourself. Camp Sweeney is a place where you could change your life times.

So that's why I'm writing this story about Camp Sweeney and the people who have to do time in here that's affecting everybody's parents. Because this is a place for the people who want to go home to their parents.

So that's why I'm telling everybody to stay away from here, because you need to stay with your parents.

-Juanito, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yeah, Camp Sweeney's a place where you can put in work to get yourself together and get yourself back with your parents from time to time until you're released and can be there all the time. But then, if you don't do the crime, you won't do the time, and you can stay free, live at home happily and never need "another chance" at Camp Sweeney. Good piece!

What I Was Taught To Do

at a young age i was taught
to do things other kids weren't
like sell drugs, smoke weed and shoot guns
that's all i knew, so i thought it was real fun
posted on the block, sellin' more things than one
you could find me in the street
gettin' money with or without the sun
it didn't matter as long as my pockets got fatter
climbin' to the top of the drug dealin' ladder
but as i got older my decisions got wiser
because i got caught up and burned by my fire
and all i got to say is a lot of people are liars
so don't believe everything they teach you
because it'll get you so deep in the game
no one can reach you

-Dopey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Some use poetry to express their feelings, while others use it for revealing deeper meanings. In both realms, poetry speaks like a lightning bolt of truth. We know many of our readers can relate to your youth, but how many can see the wisdom you eventually came to? Yeah, the hood's full of teachers that lie to provide themselves an alibi and hold their reputations high, but reality catches up to us all by and by. Why not get your education and a decent j-o-b, and graduate from the street permanently?

Why!

What drew me to crime?

A life of drugs, money and hard times,
When I ain't having fun maybe got a lil' pissed
Instead of relaxing I would go out and hit a lick
Or when I ain't had money

I would steal, go out and sell something
Get back and burn it all on some buds like it was nothing

A life of fighting, running from the 5-0
Getting stabbed, jumped and shot at by dumb folks
Selling cream, sauce, purp and drinking bo

Downing Hennessy laced swishaz and hydro but now I'm finished
Straight money I gotta get it

'Cause my mom lost her job and my girlfriend's pregnant

So until next time I hit The Beat with new rhymes

I'ma switch my old ways and say bye to a life of crime
Love to all people — see you soon

-Buddamilk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Our greatest hope is that when you've switched your old ways you won't be sitting in the hall hitting the Beat with your rhymes at all, because you'll be free. (But we'd love to keep reading your words, so if you send us something, we'll put it in The Beat Without...) Keep your eyes on the prize, which is that new life you're bringing into the world. Be the father she needs and deserves.

Girl, Remember?

girl, remember
the first time we met
i hollered atchu but
you was quick to back down
'cause you said you never
had a man before in your life
remember later that night when i
spit game for you over the phone
told you "never to worry
'cause i'll be by your side"
told you "i'll stay true to you
'cause it was love at first sight"
now as our love grew over lots of months
and we talked through all them nights
i wonder how i ever slept
even though i just heard your voice
how i ever went without your lips
how i ever had it without your arms
holding me tight
in the middle of the night
and how i ever saw without the gleam in your eyes
'cause you always brighten up my horizon
but now that we're apart it's just like
????
damn...

-Mien G-Money, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Not only is your rhymin' fine, but the message you carry line by line gets that special twist at the end that pushes the poem out where silence speaks then speaks what words can't say. Sorry we couldn't keep your last word as your title, too, but we're guests of the system and it wouldn't be coo'.

Problems Locked Up

ever since i been locked up
i been having problems
but when it has to do with family
it's hard to solve them
i'm stuck inside this camp
that wants me to run
but i won't
even if i'm threatened with a gun
i try and have fun
but it's hard
it wasn't when i was out
robbing people for credit cards
i think about why i'm locked up
and i can't complain
'cause i'm the reason i'm in here
and it's driving me insane
i can't concentrate
or seem to focus
but i wish i could disappear
like hocus pocus
you feel me
well i got a c y a commitment
so if i mess up three times
i'm goin' straight to the y
and i don't want that
so i'm in a bad mood right now
i don't think you want problems

-Lil' Bra, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You keep wisdom with matching rhymes going strong until the end when your song breaks into a bad mood and your rhyme disappears like it's scared of you! It all works, too. 'Cause somehow rhyming makes even bad things feel or at least sound good. So when you drop the rhyme in the last few lines, it sounds and feels bad as your mood, which is good writing, foo'!

Just Go

just go
 leave if you want
 just go
 no need to front
 no need to hid
 anything from me
 because there's no more
 us to be
 i really wanted
 something sweet
 i really wanted
 to sweep you off your feet
 i still love you
 even if i'm six feet deep
 it's unconditional
 and you know that girl
 had you for two years
 up in my world
 baby you know
 i can't be without you
 because my love for you
 is so true
 tears from my eyes
 if you i have to lose
 you can never understand
 the point of view from my shoes
 since you want to go
 then take your first step
 but once you leave
 then there will be nothing left
 got me lost
 with one debt
 so just go
 leave it you want
 just go
 'cause no need to front
 (dedicated to anh)

-Tqviet, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Ah, it's a sad poem to read, how you're setting her free if she really wants to go. What else can you do but let your feelings show. That's love, true love, you know. You can't tie her love down; it has to come around of its own free will. Maybe it can happen that way still. What else can you do, but tell the truth, wait and sigh and try to chill?

Dreams

slow/fast to dreams
 for if dreams go
 life is barren field
 frozen with snow
 fast/slow to dreams
 for if dreams die
 life is a broken-winged bird
 that cannot fly
 dreams is a life
 that is lived for the moment
 life can end in one dream
 and won't even know it

-Lyfe, 150 Crew

From The Beat: But there are all kinds of dreams. Some have you wake up in a sweat and do your best to forget what you just dreamed. Some dreams will put you in cuffs and chains or in an early grave. And then other dreams will set you free, open your eyes to new possibilities of what you can do and who you can be. Dream of a criminal life or dream of living right, it's like the difference between day and night.

A Short Love Letter

What it do? It's ya' boy back in here. I just want it to be known that I miss my baby and I can't wait to see you boo. On some real stuff I'm ready to settle down. I'm tired of living the fast life. I'm ready to make you my wife.

-Calizoga, 150 Crew

From The Beat: How do you intend to settle down? What does that mean exactly? Have you finished school? Will you? It's the key to most everything. What's your plan. You got one right?

My Daughter

My daughter is what's been on my mind. It's like I'm starting to go crazy or insane by just thinking about her every day. And I have another kid on the way, and that's what's really stressing me out! And it's like we just got a place together in Fremont and my bills need to be paid every month — but I can't do anything by being locked up.

When I was just out, I was working at In-and-Out and taking care of my daughter, but I was still doing my other little stuff on the side, such as smoking weed and taking pills. I was just doing the fool, but before I did anything, I took care of my family first. But now my daughter is real sick, and she's been in the hospital for about four days now. That's been worrying me a lot, but I just pray to God that she be all right and that nothing bad happens to her.

But it's not like I'm going to CYA. I have another chance. But I just want to be there when my baby takes her first step and says, "Daddy!" But I know what it is I need to do, and that is to get out of Oakland — and it is happening sometime in September. I'll be on my way to North Carolina to start a new life with my family. But I just miss my family a lot! And I wish that I would stop crying at night because I'm hurting so bad inside.

-Lil' Jt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You don't say what got you back in here. Did you fail a drug test administered as a condition of your probation? We pray your daughter will be all right, and the child on the way as well. Props on getting that job and handling business while you were out there, but acting a fool on the side can undo all the good you're doing with the rest of your time. You need to have fun in your life, and a little rest and relaxation isn't only desirable, it's necessary. But you're a father now, and you need to find some good, clean, wholesome ways to have fun. Why not go all the way with changing your life? Get 100% clean and sober. Maybe go to some AA or NA meetings. There are meetings just for young people, where you could hook up with others trying to get their lives right and learn how to have fun that doesn't undo all their hard work. Moving to North Carolina will only help if you don't make the same mistakes there you've been making here. Why not make a 100% fresh start there? You've seen enough of places like this. Don't cheat yourself and your family. Much love and respect.

I Didn't Give A ...

What drew me to crime? To keep it solid ('cause I'm solid), the reason I was out there comittin' crimes is 'cause I was in the point of my life where I just didn't give a what! You know, I was all 'bout doin' whatever and gettin' money anyway I can.

I was in the same situation as a lot of other people, where I was thuggin' everything out and doin' the thang-thang. At that point I was gettin' my scrill, so it was nothin'. But I look back at all da shhh I done, and, believe me or not I did hella shhh — but ya know if I'm in here, dat shhh must've not been worth it.

I been seein' all these childish ninjas in here, and I wonder why they in here. It's coo' dough: they make they decisions, I makes mine. That's how the world's gonna be. I know I'm gonna make good fo' myself so I don't end up somewhere mo' worse!

To all the people that was in my situation, keep ya head up and do yo'self and ya fam's coo'. Ya know? It's hot out'cheah. If you don't make it good, there's always gonna be that consequence. Do ya thizzle. Out!

-Big Chris, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Every week you seem to grow a little taller, and we don't mean physically but in personal stature, maturity, character and wisdom. You're right that each person must make his own decision, but it makes it a little easier to make the right decision when you don't feel like you're the only one trying to do it legit. It's hard enough to turn your life around and stay out of trouble without feeling like it just can't be done 'cause no one you know or ever saw managed to do it. So, yeah, the others at Camp have to decide for themselves — but your giving voice to your choice might just help a few see what they really need to do if they value their freedom and their family's feelings. Props!

On My Home Visit

On my home pass, I went to a cemetery and sat down at the grave of one of my homies and drank with him. I stayed there for about an hour or two. I didn't never went to his grave before, but I finally went there to show some respect.

He passed away on January 13, 2006, on a Friday. Me and his big cousin, was here at Camp when he got killed. I was supposed to go home at two o'clock that day he got killed, but I got a couple of write-ups — so that stopped me. I felt bad when I heard he passed. Well, I ain't got much else to say.

-Zuko Mien, 150 Crew

From The Beat: From Irish wakes to gangstas half-baked and drankin' to their RIP homies, alcohol plays a part in many cultures' rituals of grieving for the deceased; maybe 'cause it can help let the feelings out and even help the tears release. And it's cool that you showed up at his grave site to show respect. But now, as much as we respect the departed, we're all about the living in our 'zine — and the spirit of your departed homie would want to see you show yourself some respect and change the choices you make before you're the next to lie in an unnaturally early grave. To do that, you will probably need to spend some time without drink and take some time to really sit down and think. Go back there sober and let his spirit wash over you with wisdom from beyond the grave, 'cause we know up in heaven he wants to see your life saved.

Trade My Life

My homeboy, Mark, got killed in 2003, and I would trade my life to get him back, just to see him one more day. I never noticed it till now, how much the homeboy had love for me. I would have killed someone for him when he was alive.

When he died, I had so much pain and rage in me. When me and my brother went to his mortuary, I couldn't even go in. I didn't want to see my homeboy layin' there in his casket. So I just got drunk the whole day — don't even remember what happened after that. I just remember that the next day, I hoped that he was still alive. But reality hit. I love ya, homie. Rest in paradise, Mark.

-Green Eyes, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Being willing to kill for someone isn't much, but being willing to die for someone is. Thank God you didn't kill for your friend, and now it's too late to die for him. But killing and dying isn't what life's about anyway. If it's what your life is coming to be about, then you really do need to reconsider. We were looking for some sort of sacrifice you're willing to make in how you live your life, say in a bargain with God — what would you offer to do or no longer to do, in exchange for your homie's life. Quitting the gang life after the Y and setting an example of how to man up to a regular job, would be a great way to save the next homie's life by leading him away from mortal strife.

Bringing My Grandmother Back

I would want to bring my Grandma back if I could because she was very a special person in my life. I would do anything to bring her back. She just passed away last year and I miss her so much. She basically raised me and I would do everything for her. She was a very loving person.

She like everybody and everybody like her. It didn't matter if you were bad or good, she was just a very loving person. Through my young years she raised me. I was at her house every day and I loved being with her and my grandfather. But she passed away I miss her. May she rest in peace.

-Lil' Goofy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds like you were blessed with an amazing grandmother. There are very few people in this world that can offer us unconditional love. But the beauty of this kind of love is that it's enduring, so even though your grandmother isn't physically here we have no doubt she is watching over you. What do you think she would say about you being in here? We think it's time you started loving yourself as much as your grandmother loved you.

Not Worth It

What it do Beat? This is S from the 150 crew. To all you girls up in juvie for doing ya night thang on the track, this goes out to y'all! Doing ya thang on the track is fun when you're with ya girls having fun thinking, "Oh, I'm about to make hella money."

It's all fun until the wrong pimp snatches you up and makes you go out there at all times to get "his" money! All because you said something to him! You get yourself beat because no money, slow money or low money, so don't even try it 'cause it's not worth it even the little money you get out of it. So I'm done 'cause they're about to take my pencil! I'm gone. Love y'all.

-S, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Can you put a price tag on a body? How much could someone pay for intimacy or love? What about dignity and self-respect? Is there a track that sells those things or a pimp who could deliver them? As you say, it's not worth it. The night thang might not be the right thang. People will try to sell anything, and there will always be somebody to buy it, but there are some things that cannot be purchased with all the money in the world. Self-respect is one of them. Love yourself.

Trapped

I wish, I was out on the block,
Freedom, that's somethin' I lost,
In the outs I said I was never comin' back,
But once you in the system it's like a trap,
But that don't stop me from being on the grind,
Forget school, hustlin's my 9 to 5
In the streets I gotta watch my steps,
Enemies, curfew probation, I can't even wear color,
To me, rules don't mean shhh,
That's the reason I'm even in this place,
But I don't care and I don't know why,
Failed with pee test 'cause I would always get high,
But its gonna change and I ain't talking about the game,
You can't trick a trickster, I ain't getting caught again.

-Lazy B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: And that's what they always say, "I ain't getting caught again." There is no such thing, Lazy. If you keep living the lifestyle and make grinding your 9 to 5, we are as sure that we'll see you in the halls again as you are that you won't be caught again. You're right, being in the system is a trap, and part of that trap is in believing you can beat it — until it snaps shut on your tail! This is a standout for the quality of your writing. It shows that you have skills you could use to live a different life and make your money in a different way, without risking your freedom or worse. We hope you see that one day.

Money, Money, Money

Dat shouldn't even be a question — what's your motivation — of course it's the money. Why else would I commit a crime? At the same time I was raised in an environment where nothing was wrong wit' committing crimes, so I adapted to my environment and tried to be the best at it.

But notice that all my motivation did was put me behind walls. I'm startin' to find a new resolution, but right now I'm locked up so I'm just plexin' and tryin' to figure out what I want to be in the best at in positive way that won't put me behind walls.

So to all you youngstas, be easy.

-Motivation Jack, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We are glad you pointed out how growing up in that environment affected how you thought about crime. There are plenty of people in need of money, but crime wouldn't even cross their mind as a way to get it. We are excited to see that you are starting to realize that the means you chose to get the ends you wanted (money) took you some distance, but in the wrong direction! By the end of this piece, you lived up to your, and we know you are going to find a positive way to live the life you want to live.

Drawn To Crime

Me, what led me to crime, well, two reasons:

- 1 – friends
- 2 – I wanted money

My friends, they don't pressure me to commit crime, but they do crime. In fact, they told me I shouldn't get involved, but I did 'cause I wanted to. I know now I shouldn't have, but I was young and greedy.

The reason I did all the crime that I did, was a need for money. Now I look back at all the shhh I did and I realize how stupid I was. But, if I never did it, I never would have met my girl. So, good things can come from bad.

But I need to make things better in the long run. Well I'm out, so stay up Beat and God bless everyone!

-Lil' Taz, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Taz, we really appreciate how you see the world from the viewpoint of a maturing young man instead of a little boy. How do you plan to "make things better in the long run?" Do you have a step-by-step plan (that begins with going to school)?

Spirit

What brightens my spirit? There are a lot of things that brighten my spirit!

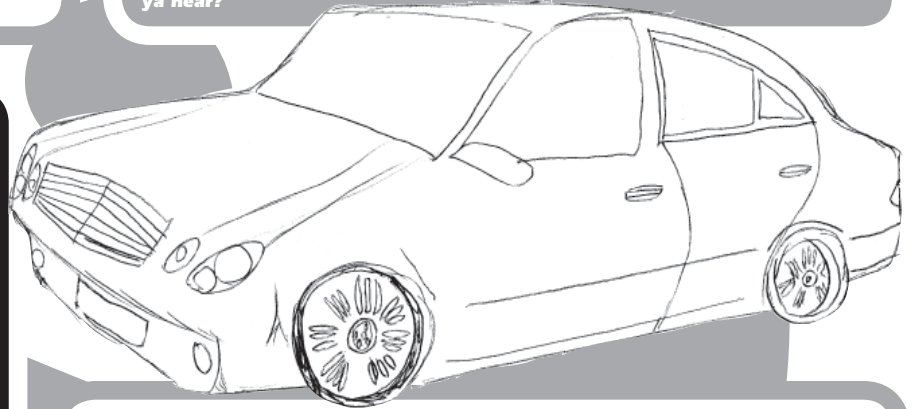
One is being free. Just knowing that I can wake up when I want, shower when I want, do almost anything I want; and I don't have someone tellin' me what to do and bossin' me around.

Another thing that brightens my spirit is seein' my girl and bein' wit' her. Just seein' her smile — her smell, her eyes, her lips, her touch — just everything about her brightens my spirit.

Also seein' my parents brightens my spirit, and not just seein' them but havin' them happy wit' me and proud of me! All of this comes back to my freedom. If I'm free, then my spirit is bright — and I ain't messin' that up again!

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Tight piece, full of what's truly valuable and important in your life. Just keep your focus on the values you praise here, and after your release, you're bound to stay free and clear. Just make your parents proud, ya hear?



A Different Road

Q-vo, Beat! This that Giggles, up in max' — but before I start, let me extend my utmost love and respect to those worthy of my love.

Back to the topic: "What Brought Me To Committing Crime". Well, to be true with all you vatos, I wasn't born to this life. My parents tried to raise me to be an angel, but I took a different road — which is a life of crime. I try my best to improve, to be good, but every time I'm doing so well, something always gets between and I end up on the same road of destruction, behind these walls, getting ready for the next level.

I commit a crime, and I don't realize what I've done till I'm facing the judge who's telling me that I'm facing a lot of tiempo. Can't do nothing but just kick back and enjoy the ride, the long ride. Should've listened to my pops and moms. But why now? I was brought to this life of crime. I can't go back and make things better. I'm already a menace to society. Reality check: Can't take it back!

So, with all this said, I'm gon' cut this criminal theory with my full-blast respect to all you felons. Till ... alratos, vatos!

-Giggles, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What you still fail to grasp is that the change has to take place first on the inside (we don't mean inside the system, though it could take place in you while you're here). You can't change what you've done in the past, it's true, but you can change its meaning for you. In this piece you've decided it means you can't change a thing, that you're already a menace, so what's the point of worrying: "just kick back and enjoy the ride...." But you know it's not a pleasant ride, free falling level to level toward the depths of the beast's belly. If everything you've done wrong becomes one more reason to change, one more reminder of the pain you keep bringing on yourself, and all of your mistakes become kernels of knowledge sprouting insight and blossoming into wisdom, if you simply make a firm, deep, soulful decision that the ones worthy of your love are the parents of the fallen angel you've become — you will grow wings and fly over these walls, first inside your heart and mind and soul, and then outside into a world so cold you have to bring the fire to the barbecue, you have to desire with heart, mind and soul to be a whole new you. And then you start to make amends just by living right, young friend!

Given the Life

given the life, knowing everything that shines ain't gold
not livin' by the hype but what filters my soul
trust in those who follow their heart
and pick, and put back together those who have fallen apart
given the life, but not yet fully lived in felicity
to rise every night, tears, at ease, but what about sensitivity
to be open-minded as an empty field
and to stand sky tall like a woman in red heels
given the life, nothing too much and nothing too fancy
to show and tell, nothing more or too classy
help those through their worst and harshest pains
and open up to those left in the rain

given the life, i can only tell you how it feels
ups and downs, lefts and rights, but i'm able to quell
to feel pain, to feel hurt, one can only imagine
to answer the question of life without knowing what life's asking
given the life i was given, yet not always believing what you see
there are always tricks, and looks could deceive
given my life, having taken the oncoming
given it's life, slowing down my thoughts, not leaving them
running

one could only imagine, given the life

-Lil' Jamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a challenge you face, given the life you were given, to keep an open heart and stay capable of living through the pain and adversity fate keeps on giving. Just as they say, it's not about being hard but being smart, not talking about crime but a mind capable of such self-control as to let the thoughts go that continually churn the pain and the hurt, until the victim of pain is ready to do worse that he feels he gets regardless of his random targets. That you already have attained a plain of consciousness that allows you to imagine this sort of strength which is really flexibility — instead of the mind's freezing the pain in place so it still hurts long past the day, learning to let go of all obstacles to feeling the grace that stays in each and every moment the mind's set free from its own negativity and can be the guardian of an open heart — yeah, that's when and where and how the miracle starts, and you've already begun to walk down a path that shines like the sun.

I commit a crime, and I don't realize
what I've done till I'm facing the
judge who's telling me that I'm
facing a lot of tiempo

Yeah That's Me

Young, single, sexy and free
Yeah, that's me...

I handle mines and stay out of yours
Yeah, that's me...

Strong, powerful and in charge
Yeah, that's me...

I'm a lover and not a fighter
Yeah, that's me...

Getting my grown woman on and staying strong
Yeah, that's me...

I love to have and save money
Yeah, that's me...

Smoke before and after school
Yeah, that's me...

Caring, needy and faithful
Yeah, that's me...

16 and no more fear or tears
Yeah, that's me...

In Unit II and telling the truth
Yeah, that's me...

Believe and achieve all dreams
Yeah, that's me...

Now I'm ready to change and achieve my dream
Yeah this is me, so baby come around so we help
each other out...

-LO. 150 Crew

From The Beat: What is your dream? More importantly, what are the steps you think you need to take to get there? We love how you keep repeating, "Yeah, that's me." It gives us a good sense of who you are. But if you were reading these exact words, but they were about someone else, would you want to be her friend? What would you like most about her? What questions you want to ask her? What advice would you want to give her? Being ready for change takes some time, growth and maturity, but when it happens, it's an amazing thing. We want to know what more this young woman needs to achieve her dreams.

Fresh Start / Last Time

First off, I want to say that this will be my last time writing because I'm getting released from Camp this week! Seven months of my life is gone, and I can't do anything about it — so I guess I'll work on my future.

The topic today is: "If you could start over," I can, I am. Even though I will still be on paperwork (probation), I feel I have a fresh start. Camp has matured me, 'cause I got a chance to reflect on my past, thinkin' about ways that I can make my life better.

I think the test for me will be when I get out and I'm back in the community. Will I stand alone or be around someone that hasn't seen what I've seen or did what I did? Basically I'm saying, will I be hanging with someone who hasn't grown up and is still acting like they don't care about police and going to jail — because I'd rather spin off on a jay-cat than go to jail with one.

To my fellow residents at Camp Sweeney: Stay solid. Knock them months out and keep yo' HV (home visit) hours.

-Diddy, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You did your program Diddy, and now you're sitting pretty, just waiting for that sweet release to walk down your home street and step in your front door and be home again. That's got to count as a major win, even if you feel like you've lost time. But you're right about the test coming after you're back home, will you get sucked back into some criminal grind instead of standing alone and using your right mind? Just don't ever let yourself commit that first crime, and you will never again have to be locked up doing (wasting) time.

Regrets

I have lots of regrets for the crimes I have committed.

If I had only thought about what I did before I did it.

I would not be doing what I'm doing now, writing about The Beats.

The life ahead makes me fear for my life.

I have to stop what I'm doing before I end up seventeen, in a big-time pen

They say they're gonna try me as an adult, for taking something that I want

I gotta stop before I end up dead.

-Christian, Marin

From The Beat: It's the nature of young people not to think about the consequences of their acts. Sometimes, they escape those consequences. But sometimes, they learn just a moment too late. Yes, you do have to stop whatever leads you to prison or an early death, Christian. The fact that you're now facing adult consequences for childish behavior isn't right in our eyes, but it is real. If you've matured now to the point of truly making the changes you know you must make, then it isn't too late after all. You may pay a heavy price for your choices, but there is life after incarceration. Focus on that, and what you have to do to live it in freedom, and your future will be better than you now think it can be. Good luck.

Somebody Pray For Me

I'm off to the Mills

For a good eighteen months

Just writin', lookin' for some good lucks

I got that scary anxious feeling in my gut

Going to a place we never been but,

I'ma try my best

And every night I lay my head to rest

I'll dream of the day I come home

So wish for the best

-Timmet B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good luck Timmet, and thank you for all the work and writing you have contributed to us. We can understand those anxious butterflies you're feeling, but once you get there and meet people, you'll figure out what you have to do to make the best of it. Hope you'll keep in touch.

The topic today is: "If you
could start over,"
I can, I am.

What Yo' Problem

what yo' problem bee

shhh something up

you off that boy

oh no man

my ninjas just got shot

i know don't let that shh

get to you my ninja

but man i got to

get them ninjas

for what happen'

don't trip 'cause in time

the game will touch them

that on me ninja

and that's my problem bee

yo' boy baby lou —

-Baby Lou, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you know it's true that you've lost control of the feeling in you, it's still coo' if you don't run out and act a foo' — 'cause when you kill a killer, you're a killer, too. And if you do evil, evil will do you! But when you see through it, you already know the game will do it. Do it yourself, and the game will do you, too! We feel you, Baby Lou.

He Sido Víctima Por Drogras

Yo he sido víctima. Por ejemplo en cosas de drogas, la misma razón por la cual estoy aquí. Sé que Dios quiere que este aquí. Yo sé que si salgo de aquí voy a volver a lo mismo. Yo no quiero volver aquí. Cuando salga voy a empezar una nueva vida. Ya no voy a hacer lo mismo que estaba haciendo.

Yo pensaba que andar en las cosas que andaban eran buenas pero asún así sabía que lo que andaba haciendo estaba incorrecto. Ahora que caí preso yo no lo pienso a lo mismo. Sé que si vuelvo andar en drogas nunca podre ser feliz. Cuando una persona está en prisión nunca puede ser feliz.

Cuando salga de aquí, voy a empezar una nueva vida. Mi vida va a ser diferente. Sólo le pido a Dios que me de la libertad y poderla aprovechar.

From The Beat: ¿Cambiará tu forma de pensar esta experiencia? Tú no eres la única víctima de droga. Hay muchas gente que estan sin hogares, sin familia, en situaciones horribles por culpa de las drogas. Hasta gente rica se han venido abajo por culpa de las drogas. La droga no respeta edad, belleza, ni tampoco riqueza. Deberias de buscar ayuda y no seguir siendo utilizado por esta epidemia. Vive la vida que tienes que vivir, pero sanamente. ¿Tienes planes en como hacer de tu vida una vida diferente?

I've Been A Victim To Drugs

I've been a victim. For example when it comes to drugs, which is the same reason for which I am here. I know that God wants me to be in here. I know that if I get out of here, I'm going to go back to my old ways. I don't want to come back here. When I get out of here, I'm going to start a new life. I am no longer going to do the same things that I was doing before.

I thought that the things that I was involved in doing were good things, but even though I felt this way, I knew that what I was doing was wrong. Now that I have fallen behind bars, I no longer think the same way. I know that if I go back to doing drugs, I will never be happy. When a person is in prison, he/she can never be happy.

When I get out of here, I'm going to start a new life. My life is going to be different. I just ask God to give me the freedom and to be able to take advantage of it.

-Elvin B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Will this experience change the way you think? You're not the only victim to drugs. There are many people who are without homes, without family, and in horrible situations because of drugs. Even wealthy people have come crashing down because of drugs. Drugs do not discriminate regardless of your age, your beauty, or your financial status. You should seek help (NA? AA?) and not continue to be utilized by this epidemic. Live the life that you have to live, but live it in a healthy manner. Do you have plans in how to change your life into a different life?

It's No Place Like Home

Where I'm from the drug dealers is the superstars and it seem like every day somebody die. No one know my struggle. They only see the trouble not knowing it's hard to carry on when no one love you.

I listen to the soundless cry of a hurt mother and I see a man wanting knowledge but too sad to get it. I'm hoping hard for better days and it seem hopeless, but I got to hold on 'cause one day I would be able to smile at people who don't want to make it.

-Smacks B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's that hurt mother and sad man that we hope will help you to stay out of places like this when you touch down. We know it can feel hopeless at times [especially those times when you're locked up], but it isn't really hopeless. You have it in your power to change the picture. You can't change how others live, but you can change how you live and how you relate to those others. What would be the most important help you could get in order to bring those better days?

Still Here

What's ups! Me again, Lil Brown Boy still in juvenile hall kicking it. I don't know when I'll be getting out.

The messed up thing is that the last time I was locked up, I did 17 months, and then I was only out for two months. I might be getting out on my 18th birthday, in June.

I'm going to try to stay out of trouble, but it's hard. But what I'm going to do is get me a girlfriend and a job. It's easy to say but hard to do.

Hopefully, this time I can get through my goal. To any of my homies reading this, take care and keep your heads up. I'll be out soon to kick it once again. But this time I'm going to be more trucha. Well, alrato.

-Francisco, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: It is hard, Francisco, but once you make a habit of doing it right, it gets easier. And then life gets gradually better. We all deserve to be happy. Give yourself a chance. Work hard at doing the right thing and only the right thing. You deserve to be happy, but you'll never truly be happy if all you do it "kick it." Get busy!

My Little Brother

There has been many times where I have felt sad, and that I should just give up on my life, and the one thing that brightens my spirit is when I think about my younger siblings. My little brother's name is Roman and he is four years old.

I can be in the worst situation and just thinking about him makes me happy. And being in here makes me sad, because I do not have him beside me. But while I am here, I keep him in my thoughts and prayers. Every day he is my inspiration to move on. Every day that I'm awake.

This is the longest time that I have been away from him since he was born and I feel like a part of me is missing. I have been there since his beginning, and I will be here to the end for him, and that I promise.

Dedicated to my lil' baby bro, Roman. Love always.

-Careina, Marin

From The Beat: You are blessed to have someone so special in your life that just thinking about him can brighten your spirits. You already know, of course, that he needs more than your words of love, he needs you there with him and guiding him. We want to make a suggestion, Careina. When you are on the outs again, always pretend that Roman is with you. That way, if you're tempted to do the things that can lead you to be taken from him, you can be reminded of how painful that is to you and how unfair it is to him. Only do those things that you wouldn't mind Roman seeing you do. If you follow that prescription, you should be all right.

Ignorance

Innocent people punished by the ignorance found everywhere, from the color of your shoes, to the style of your hair.

Hooked by what we see and read.

People are unable to be free, making life such a miserable thing,

making forgiveness a mystery.

To those who've been wounded and carried it since –
forgive and forget brothers and sisters.

It's just ignorance!

-Anibal, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: This is beautiful. Anibal, you're displaying touches of wisdom. We are very proud of you.

Innocent people punished
by the ignorance found
everywhere

Caution

If I could start my life over, I wouldn't change anything except my life of crime, because in here ain't the place to be. I would have never started stealing cars, clothes, guns, and drugs.

I wish I could've stopped my girl from getting that abortion that made my life flip. I was so ready for the baby even though I was only barely a teenager. I would have never smoked that blunt or sipped that drank, or stood on the block wit' everything you needed, because as fast as the money came it left even faster.

I wish I wouldn't have bust those shots at someone son, or grandson. I wouldn't have robbed so many people for such little money. If I could start over I would have never put my family through all that stress. If I could start over.

-Jerry B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: No, Jerry, you weren't ready "so ready for the baby." If you were truly ready then, you wouldn't be here now. Before you can be responsible for a new life (and that's a 24/7 responsibility), you have to be responsible for yourself. The fact that you allowed the system to take you from your family and loved ones is evidence that you were not acting responsibly. The idea of a baby is much more exciting than the reality of a baby. So we think you ought to cut your girl some slack in this regard. On the same hand, however, your wish to change comes across as real and heartfelt, and it gives us a good deal of hope that you are seeing the world through more responsible eyes. There's no reason why you can't change the way you live your life so that when you get out of here you don't light that blunt, sip that drink or stand on the block. If you can accomplish those things, then you will be grown up enough to be a father.

I Wish

I wish I had my brother.
Let me just start off by saying dat.
I wish I could just bring
Dem good old days back.
I wish I could have stopped
My mom from smoking crack
And changed my behavior,
No one liked that.
But now all I see
Is the real me.
A lonely man
Glued to da streets.
A mixed up person,
Never able to trust no one.
That 's all I know –
Life as an unknown son.
I wish I was whole.

-Cp 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a beautiful piece of poetry – your honesty pushes the words straight into the reader's heart. We are sorry that you lost your brother 'cause it sounds like you guys were very close. We also hope you realize no one could have stopped your mom from smoking crack except her, just as all the people who didn't like what you were doing couldn't stop you. It's scary to feel stuck in a place that you want to leave but it's all you really know. You end up feeling trapped and lost. But don't let fear of the unknown stop you from the life you deserve – a life with trust and peace. The fact that you describe yourself as "a mixed up person" tells us that you have what it takes to move past your lonely existence – self-awareness, intelligence and honesty. Use those gifts, and little by little your confusion will drop away.

Starting Over From My Teens

If I could start over I would start over from when I was first a teen. That's when I started taking my anger out on people who took care of me and did things for me all my life. The next year, I started talking back, cursing, and running away. Fifteen, I was placed in a group home and come and go as I please.

I would change it because I could probably prevent my situation and where I am today. If I could change and start over, I'd be in church on Sundays, at the movies on Tuesday and Saturdays, and I would be in the house at nine and not creeping in the back door. I would be a child of God and not a child of the streets.

-Nu Nu Baby GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The thing is, Nu Nu Baby, you still have the power within you to change. If you have the will, you can still become a child of God. One thing we'd like to add to your list of things you should do to avoid the consequences you're now living is to go to school and graduate. Wanting these things is the right place to start. Do you have the will to finish?

Starting Over

No drugs, no alcohol
Listen to my mom
Start all over
Stealing bad
Mom crying, sad
Start all over
Going to school
Graduating high school
Start all over
If I could start all over again,
I would apologize to my mom
and stop doing drugs and stop
drinking alcohol.

-Queen Bee, Marin

From The Beat: You sound like you've really thought through how you were messing up, Queen Bee, and what you should be doing to get your life the way you want it. What is preventing you from apologizing to your mom right now? What is stopping you from making the decision to give up alcohol and drugs right now? Don't let this fine poem be empty words. All of it is within your power to achieve.

Friends Are Nothing

Moms is something
Friends are nothing
You're crying
And they're laughing
They're happy
You're unhappy
They say they have your back
But when trouble comes
They disappear like crack
The only person who's got my back
Is my mom
So that's why I have to find good friends
And carry on
So when they say they're your friends
Don't believe them
'Cause all they'll be doing to you is leaving

-Cuervo, Marin

From The Beat: It is a sign of your emerging maturity that you realize how important your mom is in your life, and why you are disrespecting her when you let your friends talk you into situations like this. It is important to pick your friends carefully, Cuervo, but it's even more important to be your own best friend. Sometimes, that means quietly saying no to people who claim to be your friends but who are leading you to danger.

Disturbing The Peace

What's up Beat? This yo' boy J-Gutta and man do I have some B5 stories in store for you. Let me start off by saying ninjas is bonkers in B5. About 12 ninjas got DRBs. If you don't know what that is, it's when you stay in your room 24 hours.

Anyway, back to the subject, while during third period this one crazy white boy gave this one dude one-way trip to sleep city. I could've swore I heard the dude snoring. It was crucial. Then the white boy started stomping him. I was like, "Damn!" And then the peace officers came disturbing the peace.

You know me, I got the hell out of Dodge. I wasn't trying to get dipped and that certain staff from B2 working. I really don't want that ninja coming up here. He'll try to break a ninja in half.

Well, Beat, I gotta go. But to make a long story short, the dude got his chin strap broken and got a sandal print on his face. Well Beat, it's been sweet. See you next week.

-J-Gutta B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Guess you can say that B5 has enough drama within itself that a TV is not needed. Even though you wrote about some stupid shhh that went down, we still think this is one of your best pieces. It gets you out of your own gangsta lifestyle and focuses on someone and something else. You have a good way of explaining things. You paint a perfect picture of an event from your point of view, and since we know the "players," we can easily see it in our mind. You should consider taking your skills more seriously because you're a good writer.

Roller Coaster Ride

Damn! My life!
It feels like I am on a roller coaster
That just won't stop going
It goes faster and faster
'Cause being here in YGC
Is really stressing me out
As I sit in the small room.

It feels like a box
With the walls keep closing in
It feels like I am never going to be able
To walk outside and smell the fresh air
Or feel the rain on my face

Stop! Stop! I can't take it.
Being here is making my mind go crazy
Why can't that judge demand that I be released?
I know what I did but it still feel like
I am on a non-stop roller coaster.
Will it ever stop?

-Yesenia GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You are not just a passenger on this ride, Yesenia. You are also the driver. It may not feel like it while you are in here, but soon you'll be on the outs. Then what happens? Do you just get back on the roller coaster and let it take you back to jail? The stress and pain you are feeling now is designed to make you not want to come back. Will that design be enough to keep you out?

Life

life can be good or bad
happy or sad
depressed or glad
it just depends on how you live it
if you don't respect life
your life will be disrespected
if you're on the wrong path
head another direction
don't lie to yourself
'cause life is too short for deception
don't live life mad at everybody
instead search for resolution
but in the end it's your choice now
you live life there's no election
so instead of being the one making mistakes
be the one to make corrections

-Dopey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're coming with such wisdom, it's like you've finally got the life experience to see your way to making better decisions. And yes, it's best if you can make your own corrections, 'cause heading toward the Department of Corrections is definitely the wrong direction. It's the happy things that come only with freedom, we all want to get, and once got — keep them.

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over I would have never went with my friends not knowing they was going to rob. I would walk out these doors and not look. I would stop fighting, smoking. I would try to look at life in a non-violent manner. I would change the way I live. I would respect my mother. If I could just leave now I could tell my mom I love her. I will avoid all trouble and just live a trouble-free life.

-First Time Felon B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: There's really no such thing as a trouble-free life, but there are ways to greatly reduce the trouble in your life. There is no reason that we can see why you can't do all the things you wish you could do in this piece. You can stop smoking, fighting, and start showing your mother — and yourself — the respect you both deserve. As for your Beat name, we wish you'd change it from First Time Felon to Last Time Felon...

A User's Dream

To go to their house and get all those drugs for free is any user's dream. But to get all those drugs, pass out and wake up naked, day after day, that's a different story. I was molested, touched and used by so many men that I can't remember half of them. It was all planned out so perfectly. They pick me up at my house in the middle of the night, we drive to one of their houses, there are more of them waiting there. The drinks are ready to be drank, the H is ready to be done, and the guys are ready to do their thang.

It takes about a half an hour before I knock out. I can remember the first few, men. And trying to pull myself away from them I lose count and consciousness after about five. The soreness stays the next few days and then I'm picked up again.

You may wonder why I kept going back, and though others can't understand, it's my addiction. No not to drugs. This is an addiction that goes a lot deeper than drugs. You can call me a slut and that's your problem. Your problem is called ignorance. My problem is addiction to life!

-Lh, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: No, we would not call you a slut, or any of those stereotyped words that men like to throw around about the women they use and abuse. We don't know how you started down this dark path, but we think it must begin somewhere early with a lack of respect for yourself, an absence of self-esteem. Your writing shows that you are very smart, so that's not the problem. But the pattern you describe so well (and so brutally) makes us think that you do not love yourself, and therefore don't think you're worthy of love. If that is what is happening in your subconscious, you are just plain wrong. The abuse you allowed to happen to your body leaves you with a physical pain, a concrete reminder of what happened. But the abuse you allowed to happen to your soul is much deeper and the painful effects much longer-lasting. We hope you are getting (or seeking) some kind of professional counseling now so that you can come to terms with whatever you need to in your life that will make you see yourself for what you are: a smart, brave and beautiful young woman who needs to love yourself so that no one every abuses you again, including yourself! (We're sorry we had to change a few words in this powerful confessional, but we have to keep it "Beat appropriate.")

Yes I've Been A Victim

Yes I've been a victim. When I was not yet fifteen, that's when started hanging around my daddy. One year later he tried to put me out there on the streets and prostitute me, and when I didn't do it, he busted my lip and busted my head. A couple of hours later I hopped out of the window and ran to my mama in East Palo Alto and told her.

Now I know that if my daddy was out then he would get a girlfriend and he would abuse her. So I wouldn't want to change my life because I've been through a lot and now I am a stronger person and I like the way I am.

-Thickness GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It is bad enough that anyone, especially a young girl, should have to experience such a terrible thing. But to experience at the hands of your father must be the ultimate betrayal! What is your daddy locked up for? You're obviously a very strong individual, and we want to give you props for having the courage to share this story with The Beat

I Was Raped

I have been a victim of being raped. The crime, it's still hard on me because after I got raped, it's like nothing changed about me. But when that happened to me, bad things start happening to me like stress, depression. There's a lot that going on in my life so I'm trying to deal with it.

If I could start over and not be the victim of a crime then I would take it back. Or I would have told someone. But I was scared to tell someone. I wish that I could start it over.

-Niota GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We wish this terrible thing had never happened to you to, Niota. Is this the first time you've shared this story, or did you ever tell someone about what happened to you? Most rape victims suffer from a condition called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and the symptoms you describe of stress and depression are consistent with that condition. So, if you haven't talked to a psychologist or counselor about your experience, we strongly encourage you to do so. Time will help you get past this, but time is not enough. You can definitely benefit from talking about this with someone who has experience in this area of emotional health.

Starting Over

If I can start over I would be so happy I would just change my whole life around — be myself, not hang out with the old crew. It was cool but I'm cool off them. I need to start over. I have lots of family and church family that really got my back. If I would just been with my family I would never be up in YGC at all.

For all them kids that think your family don't have your back, they do. And if you go to church they will be with you all the way until you get out. So when I get out I'm just going to start over and never come back, and that's how I feel.

-Young Pst B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're proud of you for wanting to change so much in your life. That kind of determination promises a brighter future. But change takes time, and it also takes patience. So keep you head up and don't let anyone influence you to do anything else.

Fresh Life and Soul

if i could start over and
tomorrow wake up with
a fresh life and soul
first of all i would
take it step by step
and enjoy my childhood
as much as i can
open my mind and explore
and learn something new every day
i'd learn how to spend time
and associate with family
from the very beginning
i'd choose to go to school
instead of going out there
and doing the negative things
that will later bring consequences
i'd focus on my future
set goals and learn how to
appreciate what i got
i will also stay faithful
to the lord

-Rafael, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We like the way in the very last lines of your prose (unrhymed) poem, you switch from the conditional ("I would ...") to the future tense ("I will ..."). Maybe that's what faith in the Lord can do, even now, for you. You can't reclaim all those years of childhood you lost to the street, but you're still young and you can learn to enjoy the simpler things, the more innocent joys of life, which are especially available to the young if they can only see their way clear to claim them. And all those other things, spending time with family, going to school, setting goals ... do it! Make it your goal to do those things each day. Every day tell yourself, "just for today" I'll live my life a better way and do those things that refresh my soul.



What Brightens Your Spirit

What brightens my spirit is my mother, two younger brothers, and especially my grandmother. I have so much love for them because they show me love back. Why I love my two younger brothers so much because I am their future 'cause I know I will have to take care of them probably sooner than I think 'cause you never know. I might have to take care of them at the age of 15.

Why I love my grandmother so much is because she like my first mother, my first cousin, my best friend 'cause she took care of me since I was about four months old. But I have to give my love to my mom 'cause she been there for me even though she's had problems. But a mother's love is a mother's love. Can't nothing stop me from lov'n her.

-Lov B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have so many people that loves you out there, why aren't you with them? Why are you wasting your time behind walls when you can spend those times with your brothers? Grandmother? And momma? We're sure you don't want those two wonderful little brothers of yours to follow in your footsteps if they lead to places like this, so remember that whatever you do, they are looking to you to model their own behavior after. That's a big responsibility, which means that in many ways, you are already taking care of them because you're setting an example for them. We hope you'll think about all of them when you're free and able to make your own decisions again, so that you put them first. We also think it would be nice to show everyone in your family this loving tribute to them.

We All Saying The Same Thing

When people go to places like CYA, YGC and the pen and get out, they all say they not going to never come back. But we still keep coming back. I say "we" because I said that same shhh and I'm back in here too.

My name I go by is Ques Boom Banga and a lot of people know me for shhh I done on the outs. But none of that shhh I did to get me that name don't mean shhh. Now I'm on some other shhh. At first I was on the block trying to make a million, bat now I'm in the lab trying to get a deal and get what I got to say out to people on CD.

This thug life that 2Pac started got everybody head on same other shhh. I say that 'cause everybody going around saying that they be thugging but really not doing nothing. It's even kids out there 11 and 10 saying they thugs. Think about that.

I'm out... down

-Qbb B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing your thought with us Marques. We see you on a path towards something different, something positive, and something that will not just pay off for you but for the rest of us who are hungry for teachers. You have learned some valuable lessons in your short life. Now it's time to spread the word.

A Victim Of Being A Boy To A Man

I'm a victim of boyhood moving into manhood. The transition from being a boy to man is making me a victim. Since I'm becoming a man, there are things that I'm not ready for. I'm becoming a victim of my maturity and growth as a person.

I'm being rushed into manhood because of my age and maturity so now I have responsibilities. For instance, I still feel like a boy in jail because I'm treated like one, but when it comes time to go to court I'm treated like a man because my crimes were so serious. This goes to the rest of us treated like boys in the hall, but like a man in court.

-Lil' John, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We agree with you 100% that when the system decides you're "a man" for the purposes of the law, they have turned you into a victim. Whatever the label the law puts on you, you are still a boy, learning, growing, trying to mature. That is not an easy process for any of us, but when you are given no time to do it, it's an impossible task. We wish there were no law that gave DAs the power to decree boys to men (like a wizard waving a magic wand), but our wishes cannot change the law, no matter how bad or stupid we think it is. So, you will have to learn to live with this victimization — and as you learn, you will one day grow into the label they have put on you. You will be a man.

My Heroine

The drugs began to peak
 A smile of joy arrives
 In me
 But sedation changes
 To panic and nausea
 And bright stars do shorten
 Heart beats pound softer
 You won't try to save me
 You just want to hurt me
 And leave me desperate
 You taught me heart
 A sense I never
 Knew I had
 I won't forget
 The times where I was
 Lost and depressed
 From the awful truth
 How do you do this
 You're my heroine
 You won't leave me alone
 Just as my life turned to stone
 I bet you laugh
 At the thought of me
 Thinking for myself
 I bet you believe
 That I'm better off
 With you than someone else
 Your face arrives again
 My whole head becomes a reel
 But under my covers
 More torture than pleasure
 And just past my lips
 There's more anger than laughter
 Not now but forever
 Will I ever love you

-Noah, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Again, Noah, we are taken with how you use words to manipulate our emotions and our thoughts. Who has tortured you into such dark reveries as these, and how will you move past this darkness?

Sharky's "Just Anotha Memory"

One day I went to my mother's house, and she was so surprised and happy to see me! She made a big Mexican meal; and my mother, my brother and I sat at the table to eat.

The day went by well. She asked me to spend the night. Later that night though, she started drinking — and talking smack like before. Soon enough we were arguing and yelling. I told my mother she's a no-good drunk and that I hated her. She was in the kitchen and grabbed a knife.

I told her, "That ain't shhh! It's not like I haven't been stabbed by an enemy before."

She started crying with rage and yelled, "Say you hate me one more time!" — as she put the knife to her wrist.

I told her with bold words, "I hate you!"

She went to strike and I grabbed her arm. She grabbed a cup and bashed it on my head. I bit her wrist till she let go of the knife. She was kicking and screaming as I carried her to her room, tied her up and left her there to fall asleep.

There are too many things like that I had to do. Sometimes I feel as if I was the parent in the so-called family I grew up in. I do have to admit that if I hated my mother to the full extent of the hatred I have for some people, then I would have let her slice herself until she bled to death.

Being here in the Hall and at Camp, has calmed me down. I found the good Lord to relieve me of a lot of the hatred I held inside. That's why I feel my being here at Camp is good for me.

-Sharky, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It gets so complicated when the one we love and the one we hate, is one and the same person, the best example of which is probably the one you give here in "Just Anotha Memory" — an abusive parent. You may well have hated your mother more even than you could hate a mortal enemy, but you love her, too; and so, you saved her life even after provoking her to her intended self-destructive act with your words. Even while they were plainly true, they were not the whole truth. Some people it seems can only feel loved when they see the pain love causes in those who love them. It's definitely sick thinking, not untypical of the type of sick thinking that comes with the disease of alcoholism (which we prefer to call more simply, addiction, which includes all those sick thoughts and behaviors as central to addiction as the addict's drug of choice, in this case, alcohol). Since addiction is a family disease, however, you may have "inherited" many of its symptoms, either directly or in reaction against it (e.g., that rage you saw in your mother). This period of calm in your life, allows you to begin the process of sorting things out, most importantly looking at the part you play in your own unhappiness (since you can't control her, short of tying her to her bed). Major props on the work you've already done in this regard through your writing for The Beat!

**Sometimes I feel as if I was the parent
 in the so-called family I grew up in.**

One Eight Seven

We're so nice
 Sitting very still
 In this room where
 None else can feel
 The pain that breaks my heart
 Is day
 I'm not okay
 Sunlight shining through
 My window
 Lets me know that I'm still alive
 But why did I ever
 Let you inside my heart
 I'm such a fool
 I'll paint my face
 In shades of blood and grey
 Just take a seat where
 You can see
 A gaping hole
 Shot though my heart
 A lost connection
 From your poisoned heart

Shot from your tongue
 You end my life
 You left me here
 So now you'll never know
 No you'll never know
 The hardest thing about dying is
 Knowing you'll never see the light of
 day

A gaping hole
 Shot through my heart
 A lost connection from your poison
 heart

My head now spins
 Admired we go
 I tried so freakin' hard
 But I can't picture more
 The hardest thing about
 Dying is
 Knowing you'll never see the
 Light of day
 You ripped my heart out

You tore my heart out
 Now you're gonna pay
 I'll stab you one time
 I'll eat your heart out
 Now your gonna pay
 I'll stab you one time
 I'll eat your heart out
 So you feel my pain
 Don't you know that
 I always see you
 In all my dreams
 I want to kill you
 I want to kill you now
 While I'm gone.

-Noah, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Damn, Noah. This is both a brilliant and a terrifying poem. We're not sure if the 187 of your title refers to your own death, or to the killing you so want to commit. We call this poem brilliant because it pulled us in, made us want to know the details of how your heart was ripped from your chest. Of course, we cannot endorse any effort to take revenge or hurt another person whatever that person has done. But we can endorse your writing about it as a way of killing someone on paper. Keep writing!

Starting Over

If I could start over
I would still be the same
I would not do drugs
I would not drink
I would try to take care of my family
I would get my HSD however long it takes.

I feel mad and happy
I feel happy to be in here to find out what to do
Without my family I'm nothing
With them I'm something
I'm a son, a brother, an uncle

-Unknown, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We wish you had signed this tight little poem, Mr. Unknown. When you say you would still be the same, does that mean you don't do drugs, you don't drink and you do take care of your family? You don't have to say you "would" get your HSD because there's nothing to prevent you from doing just that. We think that's a very good place to start.

Beat Within

I'm kinda nervous because tomorrow I take my HSEE (High School Exit Exam). I'm only 15 I have a lot of time to pass the High School Exit Exam but I want to pass it the first time. I'm going to be upset if I fail. Although I already know that I am, in the math section because I didn't study. But when things don't go as I planned I get disappointed and discouraged.

I don't like to give up I like to keep on trying and trying 'till I get what I want or get it right. But I beat myself up for any little thing. And when I finally accomplish my goal it doesn't mean nothing to me anymore. It's as if I put a lot of hard work and effort into something for nothing! So instead of rewarding myself, I beat myself up! Is there something wrong with me?

Today is Monday the 21st our unit is in lock down right now because females can't keep their mouth shut and stop talking. WTF, Does this look like? Social hall? No broads this is Ala.Co. Hall, an "institution!" Follow simple instructions that's all y'all go to do because when y'all get set up, we get set up. When y'all get in trouble, we get in trouble. You suffer, we suffer! So... to all y'all new booties get your shhh straight! This unit. Handle y'all bizz ok handle you! Straight up! Real TALK!

-Juicy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We really can't understand why you beat yourself up when you accomplished your goal. Is it because you feel that you should have done it faster? It's always good to be determined and to push yourself, but you should never beat yourself up. You have to celebrate yourself when you do things well and try harder when you don't. In regards to lock down, we think that you learn a lot by being accountable to others. It's just like in life when you hurt someone, you hurt everyone. What do you think about that?

Start Over

If I could start over I would first get out of Juvenile Hall and from there that's when I would start over. I would listen more to what my parents tell me and also my probation officer. That's the reason I'm here because I violated my curfew.

Well when I get out I wanna be with my family, listen to my parents and PO. I don't want to hang out with the wrong people anymore I want a whole complete change. I'm going to be home on time and I'm going to think before I act. I don't want to make a decision that's going to get me back here.

I'm not so close to my mom or dad, but I'm here and my dad is here with me through this and I want to have a good father, daughter relationship with him. When I get out I want to focus more on school because it's important to have a good education. Basically I want to make my parents proud because I broke their hearts really bad and I love them so much so I want to change and not give them any more problems. I love them so much and I'm sorry for everything I've done to them so I want to change for me and for my parents.

I'm hoping I get out on the 30th to be with my family. I know God is with me always and he's going to help me through and the support from my parents. I know when I get out I'm going to try so hard to change!

-Maggie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Maggie, you can change today! You talk about changing once you get out of Juvenile Hall. When you get out of the Hall you will be able to prove to yourself that you changed, but you can start taking steps to that change right at this moment. We all have things that we would do differently. Some of us would have never started smoking or having sex or skipping school, but the important thing is to put into action what you would do differently. You've started a list of things that you want to change. How will you make those changes?

Same Mind, Different Actions

If I could wake up tomorrow with a fresh life, I would. I would take the lessons I've learned with me and keep the same mentality, but the actions I make would be different. I wouldn't be out doing dirt no more. I'd just kick it with my padnas when I have time because I got my school, work, and lady to put my time towards. By doing all that my mom would be happy.

Being locked up ain't nothing nice, and it got too many people stressing. I been through this stress before, and I told myself I wouldn't put myself through it again, but look where I'm at. I ain't going to say I ain't going come back this time, but what I will say is that I'm going to try real hard to change my ways when I get outta here. I'm fittin' to finish school, try and get my job back, make right with my lady, and do what I gotta do to keep cool.

-Chachi, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We like the honesty of this piece, Chachi, the fact that you've promised yourself in the past not to put yourself through this again, only to find yourself right back at it. This is the trap that so many young people find themselves in. It's so easy to make promises when other people are making all your decisions for you, but it's entirely different when you're faced with all the same temptations that led you here before. Freedom is no picnic. It requires hard choices. We also appreciate that this time you're not making promises, but expressing hopes and desires. The only way you'll fail is if you fall and don't get up again. We know you are worth so much more than being a slave to this system, and we hope you value yourself enough to make those hard choices.

Why Me?

Why me?
Why am I the one
The one to live this life?
A con's life
Ain't nice
Why me?
Why do I always
Got to pay the price?
Why?
Just tell me why?
Because this life of mines
Ain't nice
I'm getting tortured alive
Why?

-Michael LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Michael, underneath that gang banging exterior, you have a warm and loving heart. You are caught up in a world that you didn't invent, but which you feel you are forced to accept. That is why you "pay the price." We can't tell you how to pull yourself out of this gang world that helps to define you, but we can tell you that unless you find a way to see people as people and not as labels (colors, numbers, sets), you will always be asking yourself these hard questions about why you feel so tortured. We know you and we like you, so we hope you begin to see that you are worth more than your group identify. We don't know if that will happen or not, but we believe that unless it happens, you will continue to be tortured. You matter, Michael. Not your set. Not your gang. Not your street. Not your color. You!

The Voices Inside

My problem is that I need to start taking my own path, listen to the spirit that's inside me. But I choose not to listen to the voices inside me. But I had made a mistake and hopefully I will learn from it because everyone makes mistakes and not a lot of people learn from it.

But now I know that when something is about to go down I'm going to listen to the voices inside. Listen to yo' own spirit that's tellin' you something positive that you should do before you get locked up for something you did negative.

So just think before you do stuff it would make things a whole lot easier. But when you go to Juvenile Hall you should all already know you should make a change in your life so you won't come back.

I know people don't like being locked up. No freedom. So if you want to have freedom you need to make a change. It's not hard to make a change. You should make a change mentally and physically. While you're locked up just think about what your goals are going to be when you get out. That's real talk, this is my first and last time, because I already know my goals and I know how to achieve them, so that's what I'm going to do. If you don't like wearing other people's clothes and underpants. So you should already know not to be there, then it should be your last time.

-Lil' Teddy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's amazing, how deep down inside of us there's always a voice that knows what is the right thing to do. And we do anything we can to ignore it too, to push it away... but if we just listen to that voice, it can be our guide to do the right thing. But we have to disagree on one count: You say it's easy to make that change. If it were easy, then everyone would be doing it right? The Halls would be empty. We think it's hard to change: It takes support, determination, inner strength, and mostly, a real plan. What's your plan? We want to hear it.

people don't like being
locked up. No freedom

My Life

Filled wit' struggle and strife
Every day every night
Lookin' over my shoulder to survive
My life on green light
Steady committin' crimes
Late night on the grind
Only thing on my mind
Was money at the time
Feel me?
Dollars on mine
Yeah I try the good life
But its problems on side
So you gotta stay tucked
Somethin' cool on the waistline
But where it got me?
In the hall surrounded by walls
Don' straight time
I'm sayin' my life serious
So keep in yo' mind!

-Danny, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This terrific little poem shows the predicament perfectly: It's hard to stay away from trouble. And if you get in a little bit of trouble, somehow you feel the need for protection, and then that gets to be more trouble, not to mention the stress. It's like this poem is pulled in two directions - one towards destruction, one towards the good life. Are you pulled in two directions too? What does it mean to "keep in yo' mind?" How does one do it?

Taking Care of Things

I say to many people that I wasn't raised the way they think, but the streets of Oakland made me like this. My family was going bad so I got out there to feed my family to better my house hold and keep my name up in the my streets. I'm probably not as bad as people say, it's just maybe I might be misunderstood.

I wouldn't be here or doing what I do if my grandma was here. But I'm good at what I do because I do it good. If it's feeding my family, that's what I do. If it's protecting my family, that's what I'm gon' do. I might change but I'm going to be that person in the city, trying to get back on the map. Things are delicate like my family, that's why I might be drawn to time. I raise my team.

-Kip Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is so hard, we feel how confusing it must be for you. On the one hand, you want to do the best for the people you love, and you want good things for yourself: Food, shelter, good clothes, respect. On the other hand, right now, you can't protect your family, you can't be with the people you most love. Is there a way to support your family without the crimes? Have you talked to your PO about hooking up with a real job? Your grandma's gone, which means you feel that pressure to be the man. But can the system raise you into a man?

What Drew Me Here

The things that made me commit crimes is when I was younger, people used to cap on me because I didn't have the newest clothes. So to make it so I would not be laughed at, I stole from people to get money. then after I got so much money didn't know what to do wit' it so bought some weed I knew if I had weed, I would still sell it or smoke it to get high.

Being high made me think of more things I could do to get more money, and now I'm in the hall, facing 25 to life...

-Young M, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are facing some difficult times...and it looks like you're also taking stock of what got you hear. You have been through so much at a young age, and now facing serious charges, you have so much to teach other youngsters who might be heading down a bad path. What is it that you think about the most? What do you do to keep up your mental strength? What would you like to broadcast to the world about the things that first put you in this position. You seem to have a very wise sense of what leads a person into crime, you have much to teach.

What I Would Trade For My Father

Eleven years ago, I lost my father. Back then it ain't bother me like it do now. All I remember about him was that he was in the navy and he liked to play Dominoes.

To get him back, I'm willing to give up hella shhhh, anything. I'm willing to give up this fast money, the dope, my friends, the guns, the car, everything I own and this crazy ass lifestyle.

If my dad was still alive I think my life would be different. I wouldn't be in this situation I'm in now, 'cause I would be with him, and not in these streets and I wouldn't have to fend fo' myself and worry about money, 'cause he would look after me.

-On The Map, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Everything you need to make it in life is written in this wonderful little piece. Even though you've faced so much loss, even though you've been in the fast game, even though you're on lockdown, you have this love inside you, this part of you that knows you deserve better, and that there is something else out there worth more than the crazy lifestyle, the possessions, the fast money. What is that something: love, respect, strength, safety, all the things you imagine when you cherish this idea of your father. Even though he's gone, your imagination isn't. Your father can't look after you, but you know what you would have wanted from him - you would have wanted him to show you another way. So now, can you find that other way on your own? What about programs? What about finding a mentor? What would it take for you to reach out to the life would wish you'd had your father to help you find?

Fair Trade For Dad

It's easy to say that you would give anything to be free, but can you really give anything to go home? You can't give your life, family, or friends up, but you can give money, drugs, your lifestyle, or any other material that's possible. I would give up anything materialistic to have my freedom

My dad has been locked up since I was in preschool. I barely know my dad. I feel I could really give up almost everything to have my dad not go to prison, to not have shot that guy, to not have went back to that house. I would give up everything except my family and life to have my dad back in my life. All the money, drugs, materialistic things, cars everything I could ever have, I have ever had. Just to have my dad out. My dad might be in for life for catching his third strike a couple of months ago. And might never have a chance of parole.

I can honestly say anything is worth having him back.

-Ken, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel you - there's nothing more valuable than the people we love. Does your dad know how you feel? We know you can't have your dad out - but you can still have a better relationship with him, right? Do you write to each other? Do you think you are similar? Are there lessons you've learned from his life story? And mostly, what do you think your dad's hopes and dreams are for you, his son.

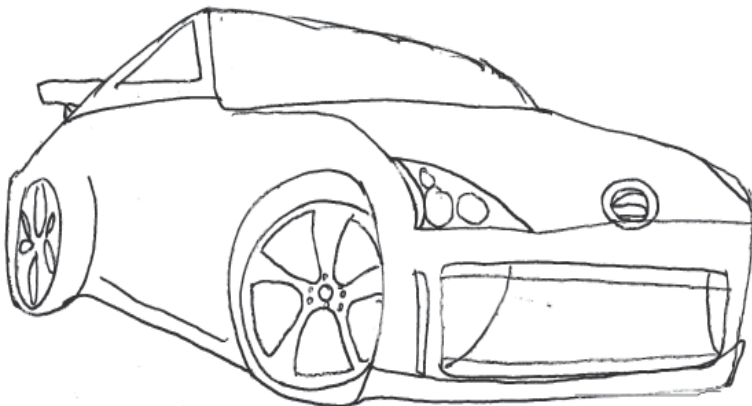
RIP Meech and Meezy

If I could start over, what would I do? I'd go back one year ago, so Meech and Meezy could be alive again. We'd all go to school 'cause we didn't go to school, we stayed on the block. I wish we'd stay off the block and try to get money another way. I'd tell them we're old enough to get a job.

I would want them to know how much our families love us and want us to do better than stayin' on the block, because I have a bad feels that if you stay on the block that something would happen. That you might get shot and killed, and that's what happened to Meech, 16 years old and Meezy 18 years old. RIP Meezy and Meech. I will always love you.

-Young Ro, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We are very sorry that your friends were shot and killed. It sounds to us that you have learned some extremely important and valuable lessons from this terrible tragedy. We hope you take the words that you wish you could have said to Meech and Meezy and say them to yourself - and truly listen to the advice you're giving yourself, because it is excellent advice. You're right, your families love you and want so much more for you than the streets can ever give. When you get out of here, Young Ro, honor your lost friends by changing the path you were on, staying away from the block, doing the things your family wants you to do, and living a long and productive life. As long as you live, so will they in your heart.



Don't Want To Get Hurt

When I get out I think about what I am going to do to change my life. I think if I don't slow down that I am going to get hurt or not even that I might get killed at the rate I am going.

My mom stresses that I am going to get hurt so when I come home I am going to stay at home and help my mom. I want to get back in school. I have not been in school for about six months.

I am only twelve. I should be playing with Barbie dolls but I am not. I am playing with guns and hurting other people but when the day comes that I get my freedom I am going to be playing with Pooter.

I just want my freedom. My mom was right. I was going down the wrong track. When I get my freedom I am not even going to think about weed, cigarettes or boys 'cause that is what really got me in trouble but having your freedom taken away is no joke. I learned the hard way, but I was trying to change. When I get out I am going to try even harder.

-Churinha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Change is never easy. It takes a lot of time and even more it takes a lot of determination. A lot of people talk about change like it happens magically or instantly. It doesn't. But the biggest change has to happen within you first. You have to make up in your mind that you want to live your life differently. James Baldwin wrote, "Freedom is not something that anybody can be given. . . people are as free as they want to be."

I am only twelve. I should be playing with Barbie dolls but I am not. I am playing with guns and hurting other people

If I Would Have Known That This Was The Endgame

What drew me to crime was the love of money. Me I love money, so that means I will do anything for it so that's what drove me to selling drugs and robbing people.

If I would have known that this was the end game I would have never started what I was doing, but I was like every other kid. I wanted to be like everyone else instead of trying to be like myself. If I did I wouldn't be in the same place I'm in right now.

-Lil' Marie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The good news is that it's not the endgame, you're going to have another chance to "be like yourself" and get what you want without the crimes. And you came out of this with the kind of smarts and self understanding that some people don't even have when they're twice your age. So if you follow up on what you write here, do you think you might even be ahead of the game?

Jail Life

What's your problem? My problem is that I been using someone else's underwear and socks, pants, sweaters, shhh. This is a mess. I hate this. Can't use the bathroom when you need to or get a drink. You can ask, but they might say no, or they might say you can use the bathroom but you got room time and if you are top citizen that can be taken just by going to the bathroom. Top citizens have a lot more privileges than other people. Really, the privilege is to go outside and have free time. That's kind of weak.

-Lil Hammer, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Right, it's amazing how being in the system cuts at the very bone of how a person ought to be able to live, right? Does thinking about this help strengthen your resolve?

Come Back To Me

Wherever you are
I won't forget about you
I'll always and
Forever be yours
For an eternity
I have cried for you
And I don't want to no more
I've shut down this love for you
That now I want to scream
Come back to me
They ripped you away from me
They took you so far
From me
And took my skin apart
From yours
And now pain enters
And silence is there
I'll be here wondering
When can I breathe
Come back to me
'Cause I can't live without you
I rather die instead of
Losing you
Come back to me
That my heart does not exist
In any woman's hand but yours
Don't be late no more
Please come back to me
Please don't be late
Don't leave me like this
Me without you I can't go no more
Free me from your hate
And of this mortal death
That's in my heart
Save a spot for me
Even though if it's millions
Of passing years
But just know
That I'll love you
Until my ending days

-Lil' Puerto Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Love can bring both pain and joy. And it's obviously much better when it's new than when it's old. However, those are things that anyone with a heart knows. What did you learn from your experience with this person? Are there things about her that you hope to find in someone else? We're sure there are things you don't hope to find in someone else. What are those things?



A Thought On HIV

Deep, deep, deep
Inside my mind
As I get deeper
I feel my true vibe
My heart
No longer should hide
'Cause I found the feeling
To stop this deadly bleeding
Thinkin' about the many
Who are infected with HIV
See you losing those
Don't try to be me
'Cause you'll end up
Knock out combination 1-2-3
My focus is not vague
It's not un-control
But it's wanting to be free
Mixed feelings was a part of me
But now I can understand me
See
Being un-passionate
Will get you nowhere
But you choose to smoke
Tobacco that causes cancer
With no hair
Yeah! I know you don't care
But let's face it
Life is unfair
So is it focus that

You need
Or is it the feeling
Of internal bleeding
That's got you wanting
To have un-protective sex?
I know you don't understand
'Cause you're still a child
But don't let this be
The reason of your denial
'Cause later on the road
You'll have 23 million
And one simple trail
Infested
Dead
Six feet under with
Maggots feeding on your head!
What the hell were you thinking?
Now you're just another number
With an immune system
That hungers

-Lil Puerto Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow! HIV is something that shouldn't be taken lightly. People need to protect themselves, yet so many young people feel themselves invulnerable, as if what happens to others can't happen to them. Unprotected sex is a risk for both you and your partner - and everyone else who has a sexual relationship with one of the two. It's easy to say, they get what they deserve - but we as people in a community, need to help everyone make more responsible decisions or we will all suffer the consequences.

**What the hell were
you thinking?
Now you're just
another number**

I'm The One

See I'm the one
They call Lil' Puerto Rico
Comin' from San Juan
Yeah you know Puerto Rico
See I ain't the one
Looking for them hip-hop
hunnies
Talking 'bout she wantin'
To be some one else's playboy
bunny
See I'm the one
Looking for that girl
That look good
Cook good
Don't listen to rap
But she still know
When to book
See I ain't the one fo'
Playin' these games
Just wantin' to be
With me 'cause
I'm known for my fame
See I'm the one fo'

Passionate kisses
Believe me sweetie
Never compare you
To other breezies and witches
See I'm the one
Searchin' for that baby girl
Not only wantin' her
'Cause she got somethin' good
See I'm the one
Eighteen in the streets
But really baby
Twenty-eight in yo' B-E-D
See I'm the one
For marriages
Get on one knee
And ask you
Are you only for me?

-Lil' Puerto Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Puerto Rico, you've described the kind of girl you want - BUT the question is, what makes you the "One"? You've got a way with words and spit good game, but what can you offer this girl that ain't just the same? We know that you are talented, and we know that you've got skills, BUT where will you be in ten years, and how will you pay the bills?

Who Can Be Me?

Who are you to judge me?
What does it take...
To show you that I'm only about me?
What!
A tattoo that says
"Only God Can Judge Me"?
I know I'm locked up in a cell
But who are you to say
That I fail
Society can't beat me
'Cause physically and
Mentally I'll be free
See I'm getting ready
To branch off my family tree
And you choose to be
The one called
The great "He"?
Man! Get up out of my face
'Cause February 8, 2006
Was the last trial I'll face
I know it's all one test
But check this man
I'll be the one they call
The Best

-Lil Puerto Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The best what? Writer? What do you want to be the best at? Well, with your talents and ability to endure harsh circumstances, we don't think you'll have too much of a problem doing whatever you put your mind to. So what's the plan?

Devil's Hell

It's seems like
Have been holdin' it
In for such a long time
Even though this crime
Was nothing more than
A waste of my time
I've isolated myself
For so long
Thinking about my
Step-dad now that
He is gone
Alone in a cell
It feels like I have
Presented myself
To the Devil's Hell
'Cause really I did not
But only to blame myself
'Cause I'm the one
Who fails
I gots to be a man
About what I do wrong
Take heed upon
The word of the Lord
And feel as big as
King Kong
Really though
Suck it up and deal wit' it

'Cause if I don't
I'll end up with
Some b-shhhh
I'm goin' to focus
On the task at hand
Which is me
And myself
'Cause if I don't
I'll end up asking
For the wrong help
It's time to stand
Up like a man
And get back
To being my own helping hand
'Cause this time that
Is going by slow
Should be time
I accomplish some
Real goals
At last don't let the
Time get to me
'Cause I'll be a young man
Bound to be free

-Lil Puerto Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice... Getting yourself out of isolation is a great start, but how will you mix into the community? What are the goals that you are setting for yourself? What does that mean, to be free? Free from what? Once you stand up, where will you go? Great writing!

Lost Life

One person I would want back in this world is my cousin, Juan. He was too young to go. He just got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. He wasn't into gangs, drugs, nothing like that. He was actually real smart, and had something going for him in sports.

He was just a little older than me and was one of my closest family members I had. We were always together except when I was doin' some messed-up stuff. He looked out for me like he was my older brother or something. Now that he's gone, I know he's lookin' out for me and is disappointed at where I am.

I would give up my life for him to come back, in a second! I wish it was me instead of him, 'cause he deserved better. He could've become something in this world. Something else I would give up for him to come back, is my street life — my gang, drugs, girls, crime, anything! He would want better for me. So, that's what I would give up for his return. But I know when my time comes, I'll be with my cousin once again.

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you can take this love and respect you have for you cousin, put his words of advice to you in your ear even now that he's gone and listen to the truth he tried to share with you, if you can do what you say you would do to bring him back to life — his eternal spirit will shine with pride. Instead of two lives being wasted here on earth, his (by an early death) and yours (by way of that street life which is really a spiritual, emotional and physical, death style), you can carry his promise, his light, the meaning of his life, into the world. And you don't need to be a sports hero to do it! Sports are great, but that's not what made you love him.

Life of Crime

Crime is something that happens everyday. Some are little ones, and others are pretty big. Some go undetected, and others are a major deal. For me, crime started when I was a little boy growin' up. I started off stealin' little things, 'cause I needed stuff and I'd seen older folks do it.

After stealin', I started fighting and jackin' people. The reason I did more crime, was because I got into gangs, and the reason I got into gangs was 'cause my older brother was in it and I looked up to him when I was younger. I was also more vulnerable and gullible, so I got peer-pressured easily.

I'm in max unit right now at Alameda County Juvenile Hall, so my last crime committed was pretty serious. Once I get out of this place, I most likely will continue my life of crime. I just won't do it as much and as serious shhh. And when I do dirt, it's gonna be undercover — and I'm'a make sure I don't get caught up, 'cause I ain't comin' back here! I want to change and stop committing crimes, but it's hard. I'm'a try my hardest to do good — finish school, work, take care of my family. But only time will tell.

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Promising to change when all your life story tells you that you won't, probably seems like a weak thing to do and dishonest, too. The one thing you need to be, if you don't want to come back to place like this, is honest with yourself. We can feel the power of truth in what you write. Addicts who could not quit using to save their lives, swear not to go back to drugs (it all started with Bill Wilson who founded Alcoholics Anonymous) just for today! No matter what, today, I will not commit a crime, big or small. Just tell yourself that each day, and one day at a time, if you can keep that no-matter-what attitude going for just one more day, and you develop the habit of not committing a crime now, not today, no matter what — you may surprise yourself. Of course, it helps to change your playgrounds, playmates and playthings. You feel?

Once I get out of this
place, I most likely will
continue my life of crime

What Drew, Drew to Crime

Honestly, most of us grow up around areas where crimes take place twenty-four/seven!

So as we age, we think it's the thang to do, to either have fun or to prove a point. Plus, when you desperately need money and are not able to get a legit' job, the only other way is to take it to the streets. Do what is need to stay on top!

What drew me to the life of crime, streets, and all, was the rush, the adrenaline. But believe it or not, I never sold drugs. My father and mom made me promise that for my own good I would never sell any drugs — and that I should change my ways out there on them streets befo' somethin' bad happen'.

-Drew, 150 Crew

From The Beat: For sure we believe you. You've been writing truth for a good while now. You state the problem, the ubiquity of crime in impoverished streets, clearly. On a social level, we need jobs for youth, or some legitimate and productive way to make pay, but on the individual level, it's up to you to become the exception to the rule. Maybe your getting caught up was that bad thing your parents didn't want to see, but the way you're doing it, this time may not only have saved your life today but saved the rest of your life by changing what you do and say — you're not just serving time, you're making the time serve you. Props.

What drew me to the life of crime, streets, and all, was the rush, the adrenaline

Sucka In Disguise

don't hate me 'cause you ain't me
you gotta respect me 'cause i'm dada baby
when you look at me i see hate in yo' eyes
and when i look at you i see a sucka in disguise
see i told you — don't hate me 'cause you ain't me
you gotta respect me 'cause i'm dada baby
i know it's hard for you when i'm gettin' money and you'
not

when i'm drivin' some of the flyest whoops and you jock
and the bestest girls in town pulling up for me on my
block

see i told you — don't hate me 'cause you ain't me
you gotta respect me 'cause i'm dada baby
see i ain't the captain of the boat but i'm on the yacht
or i ain't actin' like i will but i know i won't
but some ninjas be actin' like they' real and they know
they' not

see first thing first you gotta stay real to the game and
respect all

you even gotta respect the haters
not 'cause they hate but because they' congratulators
they hate so much that they' the only ones that keep yo'
name lit

so like i said — don't hate me 'cause you ain't me
you gotta respect me 'cause i'm dada baby

-Dada, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know you're throwing this rhyme out to the street, but we respect you because of your soul's passionate heat — and despite your tough exterior we see into your heart and the love in there. It's sad though how the street wars get love all twisted, 'cause of how the ones you loved the most suddenly no longer existed on this earth. Violence and murder is a curse that damns way to many youths to an early ride in a hearse. Maybe you think we're from another planet, but damn it, we have to put that into reverse and we can't — only you can take that kind of strong stand and make it count. These years you'll be at the Y, as the murders on the outs mount, think about changing direction — we don't need more young men in the house of correction. And you know, you just might save that next young man from an early grave.

She Tryin' To Live Off Me

baby girl was fine
but didn't have the right state of mind
baby girl was all i needed
but she couldn't keep a secret
she was the love of my life
but i still cheated
she gotta be 'hood
she gotta be 'hood
but not this one
she was too square for me
while i was out making money
she was in the house tryin'a sleep
but when them new jordans come out
she expect me to put 'em on her feet
and when she hungry
she call me on the phone and tell me
to bring something to eat
but it ain't not one day since we been together
she then bought something for me
ain't put a damn thing in my stomach
or no shoes on my feet
and expect me to give her some money
so she can go shoppin' "b"
i tell her no i ain't got no money
she say well you can't get none tonight
i tell her you can keep yo' love baby girl
'cause i'm on a all-night flight
she say what that mean
i say i'm packin' my bags
you'll see me in yo' dreams

-Dada, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The thing about these one-sided exchanges is not the money itself, 'cause it's got nothing to do with poverty or wealth — it's just a symptom of the disease. Love is the issue, and no one wants to feel unloved and misused. Love is all about giving, but when only one is living like that and the other only takes and doesn't give back — it's not a matter of balancing the books. It's a symptom that love is missing on one end of the equation. We're just sayin' don't let the money confuse you, 'cause love is the real issue. And by the by, being square has nothing to do with her taking you for a ride — a square girl will hold up her side plus help make you wise and keep you alive and free. It's not about 'hood or square but about love being there.

One Life

life is like a coin
you can spend it anyway
you please but remember
you can only spend it once

-Drew, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your wisdom is like money in the bank.

To My Fallen Folks

see this one right here
go out to all my fallen folks
see they keep the real from the fake
the haters from the players
and separate the women from the men
and the boys from the girls
and they never gave up
so that's why i keep thei' spirit lit
in loving memory of the fallen folks
y'all still the ones i love the most

-Dada, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know we can't call out your turf, even when you're memorializing folks you love that got murred. But if you want to keep their spirit lit, free yourself from the curse that did it. You try to keep it solid for the game, but the game itself is real killer's name. You see it as pursuit of wealth and fame, but it's nothing but death, grief, incarceration and pain. It's time to change.



Estoy Feliz

Que paso amigos? Ya deben de saber que voy para un group home. Estoy contento porque tal vez me voy el viernes. Espero 3/24/06. Espero que ya me vengan a recoger para poder estar en mi casa con mi familia porque ya estoy aburrido. Tengo casi dos meses pero voy a ser una promesa a mi jaina y a mi familia de nunca volver a la juvenil o a otra cárcel. Ya casi voy a los 18 años. En el otro mes cumplo 17 años y espero que cuando salga pueda ser mi vida normal como cualquier persona. Espero que también mi homie D salga pronto porque nos agarraron juntos por haber corrido del campo.

Esta es la última vez que escribo para el Beat Within. Al rato a todos los homies que estan encerrados.

From The Beat: Esperamos que termines tu programas y que vuelvas a tu casa con la familia quien te quiere y que cumplas tus promesas. Si, ya estamos viendo que estas creciendo y cada día que pasa llegas a las edad más difíciles de la vida. Esta bien preocuparse por los demás, pero también tienes que preocuparte por ti, para que todo te salga mejor en la vida. ¿Cual son tus pasos para poder realizar estas cosas que tienes en mente?

I'm Happy

What's going on friends? Y'all should already know that I am going to a Group Home. I'm glad because maybe I'll be leaving on Friday. I hope I leave 03/24/2006. I hope that they come pick me up already so I can be at home with my family because I'm bored.

I've been here for almost two months, but I am going to make a promise to my girl and to my family to never come back to Juvenile or to another prison. I'm about to be 18 years old. Next month, I turn 17 and I hope when I get out, my life can be normal just like another person's life. I also hope that my homie D gets out soon because they caught us together for running from Camp.

This is the last time that I write for The Beat Within. To all the homies that are locked up, I'll holla at y'all later.

-Greñas, 150-Crew

From The Beat: We hope that you finish your program and that you go back to your house and be with the family that loves you and that you fulfill your promises. Yes, we are seeing that you are growing and with every passing day, you are reaching the most difficult ages in life. It's O.K. to worry about others, but you also have to worry about yourself so everything comes out better for you in life. What are your steps in order to be able to realize the things that you have in mind?

Voy A Salir Adelante

Para empezar le quiero dar las gracias a Dios por tenerme otro día más con vida. Pues llevo una vida desordenada en la cual solo en la cárcel paso. Yo quisiera cambiar mi vida. Pues miro que toda mi juventud se está quedando en la cárcel y ya no quiero seguir así.

Este tiempo que he estado encerrado me he puesto a pensar mucho y la verdad es que no vale la pena estar dejando mi juventud en las carceles.

Al salir esta vez, pienso cambiar mi vida totalmente, buscar trabajo y empezar una nueva vida. Quiero volver con mi familia a la cual quiero mucho. Quiero poder seguir ayudando a mi madre, quien es la persona que más quiero en esta vida. Ella es la que me dio el ser y la vida, a la que le debo todo lo que soy.

From The Beat: Creemos que hay solución para organizar tu vida. Sabes a muchos de nosotros, los adulto, nos tomo tiempo darnos cuenta que la juventud se nos fue en cosas tontas. No dejes que esto te pase a ti. La niñez y la juventud es la etapa más maravillosa que alguien pueda tener. Las metas e ideas las tienes, ahora lo que te faltan son las ganas de llevar acabo todo lo pensado. Te deseamos la mejor suerte Alvarado. No dejes que nadie te quite tus sueños.

I'm Going To Come Out Ahead

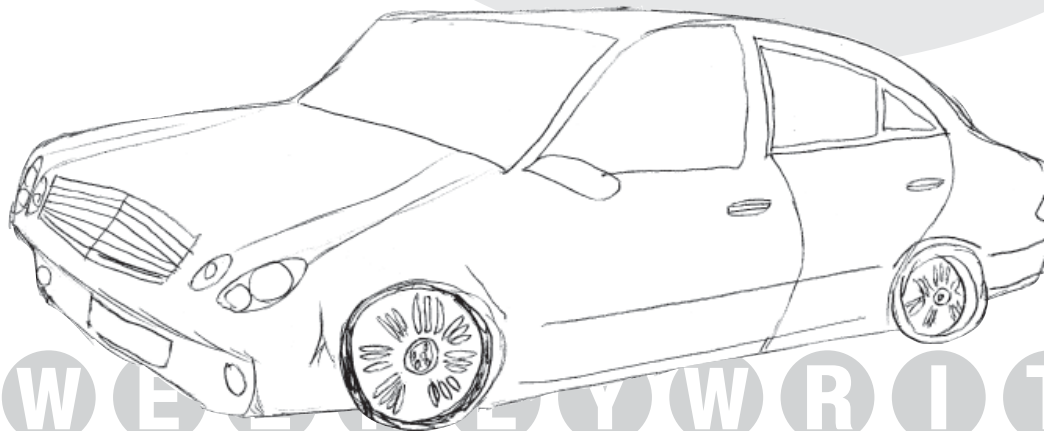
To begin, I want to thank God for allowing me one more day of life. Well, I lead a disorganized life, of which I spent most of it in jail. I would like to change my life. Well, I see that my entire youth is being spent in jail and I do not want to continue like this anymore.

During this go around of incarceration, I've started to think a lot and the truth is, everything I've been doing is not worth leaving my adolescent years behind in jails.

This time when I get out, I'm thinking about changing my life completely, look for a job, and start a new life. I want to return with my family, whom I love very much. I want to be able to continue helping out my mother, who is the person that I love the most in this life. She is the one who gave me life and she is the one who I owe everything that I am today.

-Alvarado B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We believe that there is a solution to organizing your life. You know, it took many of us adults time to realize that our youth was spent on stupid things. Don't let this happen to you. Our childhood years and our adolescent years are the most marvelous period of times that a person can have in life. You have the goals and the ideas. Now all that you're missing is the will to carry out everything that you are thinking of. We wish you the best of luck, Alvarado. Don't let anyone take your dreams from you.



Mi Vida Nueva

Comenzando una nueva vida sin tí
Es bien doloroso

¿Como voy a poder superar eso?

Man, y todavía no puedo creer que todavía estoy aquí

Sólo quiero tomar tiempo

Aquí en PSK y hacer mi tiempo

Tengo la oportunidad de ir a casa.

No quiero ser como mi hermano mayor

Metiendome en problemas (cárcel/prisión)

Yo no soy desmadrosa ni siquiera

El tatuaje que estoy haciendome en mi pecho

"Amy Angelina Sanchez Gonzalez por vida."

From The Beat: Bueno si no quieres ser como el, pues tienes que hacer algo por tu vida porque si sigues la vida de esta manera, vas a terminar igual que el. Termina tu tiempo y veras que muy pronto vas a estar con esa persona especial que espera por ti afuera. No tienes que tener tatuajes en tu cuerpo para demostrar cuando quieres a alguien. El amor se lleva adentro de uno mismo.

My New Life

Starting a new life without you
Is very painful

How am going to be able to overcome this?

Man, and I still can't believe that I am still here

I just want to take some time

Here in PSK and do my time

I have the opportunity to go home

I don't want to be like my older brother

Getting myself into problems (jail/prison)

I am not even a troublemaker

The tattoo that I am getting on my chest

"Amy Angelina Sanchez Gonzalez for life."

-Las Tejanitas, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Well, if you don't want to be like him, you have to do something for your life because if you continue to live life the way you were living it, you're going to end up just like him. Finish your time and you'll see that very soon, you're going to be with that special person that's waiting for you on the outs. You don't have to have tattoos on your body to show when you love someone. Love is carried inside of you.

To Bring My Mother Back

I would trade something to bring somebody I love back to life. I would stop doing negative things and would want to bring my mom back to life. I would cherish her dearly and stop giving her problems, headaches, stress and death. I would listen and respect her and not neglect her. I would give her everything she could ever dream of having the whole world.

-Laroo

From The Beat: We wish it were as easy as that, Laroo. But, of course, your mom will always live as long as you do. You can't go back and change the past, but knowing what you do now, what changes do you see in your future? If your mom could sit with you now, what would she be telling you about what she wants from you? Can you give it to her?

Using My Time Wisely

Dear Beat,

It's hell in here and I can't wait till I get my placement release so I can do my six months and get it over with. But I'm not going to be stupid and run 'cause then I will get even more time. That's not me. I will have a future and I'm going to spend it wisely.

-Black T

From The Beat: Good for you Black T - you do deserve a future, and one that doesn't include running from the past or always worrying about getting caught. It sounds like this time in the halls was just what you needed to remind you what is really important. What's your plan for when you touch down?

What Is My Problem

Well one of my problems at this moment is I'm locked up. I can't do what I want to do and I can't go where I want to go. I barely get to eat (REAL) food but that's what I get for putting myself in this position.

My time is coming though and it's coming fast. In a few more days I will be going home for good. But I'm gonna have a little more problems when I get released because I owe a lot of money for being locked up for court fees and all that other bull. I have to pay because I did the crime and I did my time. Now it's time to cash out in full. I'm out.

-Erik

From The Beat: With all of the things that are facing you, we know you are ready. We know you are going to work hard and do what you need to do to stay of trouble (especially now that you are 18). We know it's not easy to do but then, neither is the alternative (being locked up). Try not to worry about the money - you will pay it off, even if it takes some time. Sometimes we can't let the things that are out of our control get to us. We just do what we can and have a little faith (and put in the effort) that everything is going to work out.

For Love Or Money?

This is Stoneface. I do crime to get what I want, ya feel me? I rob houses and sometimes come up so I guess I'm really doing it fo' money.

I got started wit' one of my partnas. I seen him wit' hella stuff, comin' fitted all the time. So one day I asked him what he was doing and he was like, "Do you really want to know?" I told him yeah, and he said, "Go get some other clothes on so you won't mess up the clothes you got on."

I did and he said go get a backpack. I did that too and we got in the car, drove hella far and got out. We went to a house (I'm not going to say how we did it) and when we came out we had a lot of shhh. We found some money and went to the pawnshop, getting over \$500 each. So that's how I got into crime.

-Stoneface

From The Beat: Thank you for this story - it is very honest and that is much appreciated. It scares us to see how easy it is for young boys to move into a world where the consequences can overwhelm them before they've ever thought about them. And we're pretty sure you haven't thought about either the right and wrong of what you do (if your mother were the victim of the robberies, you might think about whether that would be right or wrong...) because we don't see any regrets for what you've done. There's nothing really special about stealing. Anyone can do it. All it does is make you less worthy as a person each time you do it. We know you are worth more. It's obvious with your good storytelling skills you could do a lot more than take things that others have worked hard to get. It's time to grow up and start using the gifts God gave you.

Where I'm Livin

Something that drew me to crime was living in my environment because it's full of negativity. Like an old sayin, "One bad apple with a bunch of apples can ruin everything," or "A dog with fleas that jumps on you - it's contagious and you can't help but get touched unless you leave."

-Laroo

From The Beat: It is true that one of the biggest influences on how we think and act is where we spend our time and what we see. But even with that, you still must take responsibility for the choices you make in life because the consequences happen to you. Like all of us, you have made some bad choices. What are you going to do both to rectify the choices you've made, and to make better ones in the future?

On The Real!

On the real for real ninja
Man you know what's funny
Thugs, gangbangers and shhh
Is that all the time they're locked up
They pray every night
Believing in God
And writing to The Beat
That they goin' to do good
When they get out
Then you see
That same person
Back in jail
Next month
I be like...

I thought you was goin' to do good
When you get out
But I don't understand
Why you goin' to pray
When you don't do that shhh
When you get out
Instead you go home
To the streets
And roll a blunt
And that's when you told yourself
'Bout doing good
But you don't know
That people know you lying
About all that stuff
I mean
I know when I get out
I'm-a go back to the same shhh
And just change a couple stuff
About all that
But shhh
I mean
I'm still goin' to do
What I got to do
The real tho'
Real...
Be true to yo'self.

-Lil B-Dazzle

From The Beat: We gotta give you your props for calling it how you see it, but we see it a little differently. First, there's you. As long as you're down to keep doing what you do, then you'd be a fool to think the system isn't down to keep doing what it does, too - namely, to lock your butt up like a slave! Then those who you see as hypocrites for praying to God that they're going to change, but not changing. We know many young people (and old people) who fall into this category, and that's a shame. We think they are sincere when they promise to change, but that the pull of drugs, the streets, easy money is just too difficult to resist. They aren't strong enough to stand on their own yet. But there is a group of people that you have left out of your calculations, and those are the ones whose eyes are opened by their experiences both on the outs and on the ins, and who make a serious effort to change their lives for the better. Those are the ones who realize their families are more important than their homies, that school is more important than a blunt, and that living as god meant them to live in freedom is more important than handing their lives over to a bunch of strangers. We wish you were in that group...

Crime And What Drew Me In

What drew me into crime was the quick money, the fast glamour and the fame you get from the quick money. Crime drew me because it was very easy and I could make as much money in one day that would take at least two weeks of work. What drew me into crime was the people around me because I saw them doing crime and getting, everything they want, so I figured I needed to do what they did to get what I wanted.

-Lil' John

From The Beat: If you had grown up where everyone around you stayed in school and went to work to get their money, you would have done the same? You said it was "easy," but we wonder if being in the hall is easy. And this is only the first step. The system has it designed to get harder and harder. You don't have to go to college to make money, but there are plenty of other ways to do it besides crime. How glamorous is it being locked up?

Never Had Nothing

What's up Beat and Beat readers? This is Lil' B just dropping a couple of lines for the homies locked down. But to get to the topic at hand, what first drew me to crime is living in the neighborhood I'm in, located in Hayward.

Growing up I never had anything so I think that's why I started stealing. From there I started hanging around the wrong people, started gangbanging and fighting for my neighborhood, ya feel me? But I think that's why I was drawn to crime - I never had nothing and was gonna get it one way or another.

Anyways, I'm gonna holla at y'all, so until paper meets paper I'm out.

-Lil' B

From The Beat: Well Lil' B we thank you for coming at us with the honesty you are known for. We realize you are not very interested in changing your life around at this point, but life is so much more than having things - and, of course, much, much more than living in a cage with some strangers ruling your roost. Life is more than just money. We know that sounds like something a rich person would say because they don't know what it's like to be poor, but at the end of the day it isn't money that is going to make you feel like your life was worthwhile. Of all the things you will have cherished and will be sad to say good-bye to when your time comes, it won't be a car or a new pair of sneakers or a necklace.

I Want To Be Free

I want to be free 'cause I watch TV
See I want to be free 'cause it can change me.
I'm not talking about being free
So I can go puff on some weed.
I want to be free
So I can believe and succeed
In this lifetime 'cause it's my time
To shine all the time.
And it also shines in me jack.

-Black T.

From The Beat: You are really serious about getting this second chance. Your words and tone tell us there is a sense of urgency because you are finally ready to start over and do better for yourself. It sounds like you are starting to understand what you are fighting for - you.

Crime

Nothing really drew me to crime, because I did it because it was fun. When I get a plan that I am about to start a crime, I will do it and won't get caught.

It's fun because when I do it, it pumps me up when I'm about to do a crime.

-Abo

From The Beat: Unless you think being in the hall (or worse) is fun, then you've got to find another way to have fun. Think about something that's fun, with NO negative consequences. Is there such a thing? Are you afraid to make a speech in front of a lot of people? If you want your heart to beat fast, just stand up and make a speech!

Having Nothing Drew Me To Crime

I was committing crimes because I had nothing. I sold drugs to pay the bill in my aunt's house. She does not have a job to pay bills so I gave her money and paid the rent. I live with my mom.

Now I am a changed young man. I have a two-month old girl. When I get out I will go to school and get a job to spend on her and buy her clothes and spend time with her. I am not spending time with her when I am in here. And being a good daddy and husband is important to me, so this is my commitment to my new family, which I love very much. My baby momma and my little baby girl. So I will change for the good not the worse.

-Joseph

From The Beat: Congratulations on being a new dad. It sounds like you already know how important this job is — the most important job there is — and are ready to do whatever it takes to be there for your baby girl and your family. It sounds like you have spent a lot of time worrying and caring for other people, which is a very noble thing. But we are glad to see that you are starting to care for yourself too, which in turn will help you be there for your daughter. The road ahead is going to be full of many, many challenges and there will definitely be times where you will want to say the hell with it, so keep that little baby and her need for a daddy right in the front of your mind. Stay strong and keep your head up.

How Many More Months?

Another day in this system, just staring out my window. Oh wait, what window? All I see is nothing but a reflection of myself! Just waiting for the day to come, that special day to get released. I have another month or two or three, maybe four. I ask myself when is that day coming? While I wait, all I do is reminisce of what I would be doin' in the outs — smoking, drinking, the same thing every day.

This is my second time in here. When I first got here I committed a 2-11. Now I'm in here for the same thing. When I'm in here I tell myself I'ma change. I'ma do something with my life. But as soon as we're out there we're all wild, doing and keeping this movement alive. Be safe homies. Stay up, keep your heads up and just pimp this system.

-Chuckie

From The Beat: So you keep the movement alive by letting the system deaden you by keeping you in a cage where all you can see is your own reflection. Doesn't sound like a movement we'd like to keep alive, frankly. We know how important it is to be back on the outs, but what are you returning to? You cannot keep doing the same things and expect to get a different result. We know it's always easier said than done, but what would it take for you to honor those promises you make when you're locked up? Obviously, just making the statement, "I'm not going to do it any more," doesn't work. You need something more — an inner strength to stand up to others and say no when they want to do what you know will only land you back here. Whatever you need to do, now is the time to start thinking about it, or you'll be coming right back!

To Bring Back My Best Friend

I would give up anything to get my best friend back that I just lost in January. He got shot, but I would give up anything to have him back in my life right now. It felt like I wasn't supposed to lose him that early in life. Even though everything happens for a reason right now I still feel that wasn't not supposed to happen like that.

I feel that it was my fault that this happened because if I wouldn't have been in jail that wouldn't even went down like that. I feel a lot of pressure on me because of his death and there is no way I can turn back at this time. I have to keep going forward in life from now on.

-Quail

From The Beat: We know from your writings how much your friend meant to you and we know how hard it has been to deal with his loss being locked up. Death is a tricky thing because you are always going to love and miss your friend, and that feeling of loss will never really go away, though in time it will not weigh you down as it does now. Perhaps you were locked up at that time to protect you from the same fate, you'll never know. But you do know, we hope, that you want to live, which means you have to gain control over your own life. You'll never know what could have been, so focus on what you can control, and change the path you're on.

From The 'Hood To Da Halls

Ey Beat, what it do? It's John, also known as Young-B saying what up to everybody from my 'hood to the halls.

Since I've been in here three of my ninjas got killed over something stupid. So this is to all my boys and girls from YGC to Alameda, keep it safe.

-Young B

From The Beat: Young B, we are sorry to hear about your friends. How do you suggest we "keep it safe?" How will you keep it safe?

My Problem - Money

My problem is money because once you have it you can't get enough. It's greed and all the bad that comes with it like selling for money, robbing, stealing or whatever your quick hustle maybe.

-Laroo

From The Beat: Greed is very powerful. In fact we think it is as dangerous as any drug out there. Would life be different if you could make the same kind of money doing something legit? Can you?

Fair Trade – No Crime For Freedom

I would give up my life of crime for my freedom. I'm not saying I will never break the law again, but that I won't go out just to break the law. They already are going to give me my freedom but I am going to do this for myself so I don't have to go through it again.

I just thought of something I saw in a movie. I want to help three people and help them in a way so they feel that they have to do something for me. The only thing that I'm going to ask is that they help three people and tell those three people to help three people and so on and so on. So maybe I could do some good in this world.

-Phillip

From The Beat: Was this movie, "Play It Forward"? You absolutely right that you can do some good in this world. We like the way you are thinking. It sounds like you are ready to make some real changes 'cause coming back and forth to this place has a price that is too high — making it easier for the system to put you ever deeper into the hole! Sometimes it takes us years before we truly understand some things just aren't worth it. But whatever the reasons, we are glad to see that you are starting to get there sooner rather than later.

To Do What I Want To Do

My problem is not going to the bathroom when I want to. It's killing me. My poop keep's forcing itself out and sometimes I feel like my bladder will blow up. I'm just keeping it real, feel me? It's just hard when you can't go when you wanna go, but if I never got in no trouble I would have used my own toilet at home.

-P-Nutty

From The Beat: So it sounds like this piece isn't so much about going to the bathroom as it is about not being able to do what you want to do when you want to do it. (If you really are having problems with being able to hold it, you probably should talk to a doctor...) The halls are not about taking away choices, eliminating freedom, the things we cherish most until they are gone. All we can say is learn something from this and move on.

Macking Isn't A Crime

The thing that drew me to crimes was money. I got sick of working and needed money quick, so I started stripping people and going through their pockets. It didn't matter who it was. But eventually I got sick of that so I came up wit' a new solution - I stop lacking and started macking. Macking is not a crime, it's just a way of getting money.

-Sir Mac

From The Beat: So if "macking is not a crime," how does money end up in your pocket? Let's get this straight — you started committing crimes because you were sick of working? Do you think the rest of us who work hard for what we have think it's always fun to work? Do you think we don't also get sick of it sometimes? Should we then start robbing people? The world doesn't owe us anything but we owe ourselves to find a way to honor the great gifts of our lives — life itself and freedom to live it. Stealing and scamming on females would make us feel like parasites, less than real men. We'd rather stand on our own two feet, even if that means having to do things that sometimes tire us out or make us wish we were rich. It's a matter of self-respect.

Getting Caught Up

Well first of all, I want to give my utmost love and respect full blast to all the homeboys in the hall and at camp. This is ya boy Lil' Mark from Hayward.

Well my problem is how I got myself caught up to get back in this weak place. I got caught for a 2-11 robbery and some other stuff. Man I'm hella stupid for getting caught on my homepass at my group home. I was about to get out in two months but my problem is doing stupid stuff I will regret. Now I sit in my room wondering what is going to happen.

Hopefully I get another chance and there's no time to stress because tomorrow I go to court. I hope I get some good news. To all my ninjas from da 'hood, keep it solid and stay strong. Dis vato's out. Oh yeah, hopefully I get out to camp or GH or stay till I'm 18 on E.M. Until pencil meets paper again.

-Lil' Krazy

From The Beat: We wouldn't call you stupid for doing these things, but we would say you're still thinking (or not thinking) more like a little boy than a young man. One sign of maturity is the ability to think about consequences, and to factor them into whatever decisions we make. We all make mistakes, but they're really only mistakes when we don't learn from them and keep doing them. We can tell from your words that you know it's just not worth coming back here over and over again, so don't keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

My Family Is My Problem

My problem is mostly my fam, man. My fam just don't get it. When I say fam I mean my boys on the outs. We are always getting into something. Like right now, me and three of my friends are locked up right now.

-Dario

From The Beat: What is it that your fam doesn't get, but that you do get? Or is there something you didn't get before, but which you do get now? Life is full of tough choices. Sometimes the answers we can't seem to find are right in front of us — look at where you and your friends are right now.

I'm Out

Unfortunately, this is my last time with The Beat. It's been cool. I got out on March 20th and I ain't ever coming back and that's for sho. I'm gonna go grub on a #1 Big Mac Meal and a Crunch Wrap from Taco Bell and a big fat burrito from Mexicali! I'ma be going dumb with my T, jeans, and Jordans, and with da stunners and da make up and hair done stayin' fly slappin' dat Mac Dre. Bet you can't do it like me and best believe I'm not coming back.

I'm gonna not even touch a blunt. That's gonna be hell hard but I'm not smoking. I'ma go to school. I'ma do my probation. You know I'll be with that XO, though, for sho.

For real, the minute I get out I'ma try to get in contact with my man up in French Camp. I love you baby. To all the homies incarcerated, stay up and Baby Boy, times ticking and they can't keep you forever and topper love you homies. Juicy, I love you home girl. Did I mention Sunday night oldies? Yessss! And best of all mommy! She's the best! Five more days but right now I'm locked up and they won't let me out! Much love and respect to all eyes on this! I'm gone! I love Jacob.

-Daddy Girl

From The Beat: You sound like you are ready to be super sized. Be careful eating all that food, Girl. You may want to try some lentils or baked chicken breast and broccoli. It's important that we pay attention to how we treat our bodies. Often we get so caught up in looking fly that we don't take care of what's going on within us. Sometimes that can mean eating healthy foods or taking care of our lungs or even dealing with our past and reflecting on our goals. We have to tell you that hitting that XO worries us. We've seen a lot of people doing a lot of drugs, and believe it or not, we think alcohol is one of the worst — so easy to get, so common to use, and so hard to quit! You have a lot to look forward to upon your release, but what will you have to do differently to do what you want to do?

Small Window

Every time I get up in the morning I look out my small window I think that one day they're going to say, "Room 5, you are released," but that don't happen!

-Young-B

From The Beat: Young B, that must be frustrating. But you know it will come one day, which is why we want to encourage you to think about a plan for staying out of here. Are you ready to go back out on the streets? What have you learned? How will it help to keep you free?

Small Room Wall

Every time I go in my room all I think is, what is every body doing on the out? But, I know that it ain't shhh, so I try not to think negative.

-Young-B

From The Beat: You should be thinking about what you're doing — and what you're going to do when you get out. Get your life together.

My Fault

My friends drew me to crime because if I said no they would tell everyone we know that I am not solid. So I did it to get some respect on the street and I got my respect. But it don't mean shhh because it can't get me out of here.

I feel bad because I stole something like three cars in one hour. One woman saw me and my lil friend steal hers right in front of her. She didn't say stop or anything so I kept driving. I drove to Bay Fair, got out and left it. My lil' friend was stealing another one so I just got in and we drove to Food Maxx. He got me my own car so we got on the freeway and went to Dublin to see some girls. When we were on the way home I got pulled over by the cops so I just kept it lit. Now I am in the hall.

-Birdman Jr.

From The Beat: We like how you open this piece. Sometimes when we do things for the wrong reasons it's hard to admit it, but you were man enough to say you did this because of what people might think if you didn't do it. Believe us, there are many young men and women in the halls and on the outs that are doing things because they don't want to look soft or uncool. We are glad to hear that you can see why looking solid was not worth losing your freedom because it isn't. Don't be too hard on yourself — you made a mistake. You know it and now you are ready to move on and do better things with your time.

Fair Trade

The one thing I wish I could get back is my virginity because I wish I wouldn't have lost it. The one thing I would trade for it back is my looks. My looks are the reason I lost it and because of lust! My boyfriend, which I'm still with, is the guy I lost my virginity to. I have never been with nobody else because that's for rippers!

Me being so pretty to him he couldn't resist me and now that I think about it I wish I wouldn't have done it because he's not as solid as I thought he was. So I would trade my looks to get my virginity back because if I wasn't so pretty he wouldn't have let lust get the best of him. I'm not conceited or nothing but I know when someone is lusting over me and I would trade my looks because the way I look makes a lot of people envy me because of lust.

-Shyla

From The Beat: Is it your beauty that conquered your boyfriend, or your willingness to be conquered? Even the most beautiful person still has the power to say no. You can always decide not to have sex with your boyfriend, especially if you question the security of your relationship or have doubts about him. Many times we women make the mistake of thinking that we have to have sex. Your body is yours and you have the power to decide with whom you will share it. Being beautiful can be a blessing and a curse. Sometimes it brings you good attention or draws special people into your life. Other times it brings a lot of negative energy, like lust or envy, or can bring people in your life who may not be good for you. The good thing is that you always have the power to make decisions about your life. It is the beauty inside you that determines what choices you want to make, and not the beauty outside you. Be empowered. Be good to you.

Getting Away With It

That is the question! I liked getting into mischief and thieving because I liked the way it made me feel. I liked breaking the law and not getting caught. I would always feel a rush. My heart started beating faster I believed I was unstoppable. I feared nothing.

The more I got away with it the more I liked breaking the law. Whenever I came through wit' something for my partnas they would reward me. That's basically what drew me to crime. Money.

-Juicy L

From The Beat: There is a famous song by the O'Jays entitled, *For the Love of Money*. Some of the lyrics go, "For the love of money/ People will steal from their mother/ For the love of money/ People will rob their own brother/ For the love of money/ People can't even walk the street/ Because they never know who in the world they're gonna beat/ For that lean, mean, mean green/ Almighty dollar, money." Money is a basic necessity, but we are confident that there is a legal hustle for you to get what you want. There are a lot of things that can give you that same rush. You ever hiked to the top of a hill or flew in a plane or jumped off of a diving board or won a race. Have you ever given a speech in front of a lot of people? Ms. Juicy L, your courage in the face of crime may be thrilling for you, but how could you use that same boldness and fearlessness for something positive? After all, how much of a rush are you feeling right now?

Trying To Be Cool

It was cool' for a year and one month 'Til my friends said come on I went along and said all right And now look I'm here for a fight I'm here for something I didn't do But it's all right, 'cause they will find out the truth

God knows what happened and so do I And that's why sometimes I cry But maybe God will get me and my sis out of here.

-Ja'Laya

From The Beat: You always have a decision to make, Ja'Laya. We believe you if you say you didn't do it, but maybe you are guilty by association. Maybe you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Throughout life we will always come to a fork in the road, two divergent paths leading us in two opposite directions. If you could do it all over again, would you do anything differently? Would you take a different path? Why or why not?

Enjoying Crime

What drew me to crime? I think nothing really drew me to crime. I feel like when I do stuff, it isn't even a crime to me, it was enjoyment. When I really do crimes, it do be big, 'cause I don't do it for any personal gain.

I realize that all the stuff I was doing, was a crime, about a year ago. So, for all you ninjas out there pulling licks on people and stripping them, calm that down before you end up in here. From yo' boy Alabama.

-Bama

From The Beat: Bama, what drew you to crime was the excitement. If there is no personal gain, then why do you do it? The gain for you was excitement, but now you've learned your lesson — right? Video games are exciting too, and you don't end up in jail. Think about finding excitement somewhere else, without hurting someone else.

Let Me Hate

Let me hate real quick I never liked her and I still don't Stupid red head Crazy 'ho'e... Man I think I feel way... Better... Now what, I think I'm just a hater... Lol, naw I playing... Change of subject I miss "Reese"

-No Name

From The Beat: I guess you never heard Mary J. Blige's song, but my favorite line is: "Don't need no holleration/ hateration in this dancerie." We don't really know what a dancerie is, because there is no dictionary definition, so let's just say it's Juvenile Hall. It's easy to hate. Everyone has something wrong with him or her. But once you start to look inward at yourself and find what's wrong with you, you'll find that you have less time to look at what's wrong with others. Celebrate the good in people.

My Boyfriend Is My Distraction

My biggest problem is my relationship with my boy friend of three years, and I'm having second thoughts about being with him. But it's hard to let go. Now I'm coming to my senses and realizing he's a big distraction in my life.

I now see in order to pursue my dream of becoming a big time real estate business person, I have to first be on point and do what I got to do to reach that point, which is go to school more often instead of trying to fit him into my school time schedule. I see he's not trying to do nothing with himself so it's now time for me to come to reality. I'm 17 now. Time is running out.

-Ashley

From The Beat: Good for you for recognizing that if you have an ambition to accomplish something, it's the thing you have to put ahead of a man who's not about anything. Trying to change him will only slow you down, which is not what you need. It's hard to leave a relationship when your heart is involved, but at some point you have to make the best decision for you. Going to school (and not just going "more" but really going) is the foundation you need to reach your goal of being a big time real estate businesswoman — and pretty much anything else you might set for yourself.

Confused Feelings

To put into words how I feel right now would be like trying to take a splinter out of an elephant's foot, I think I'm so confused

Usually I'm the one who's against stupid shhh...
But while I'm sitting here I'm like, "No, not again!"
But yet this marks what the 8th time, for sho
Now I know,
Hold up I shouldn't have started, but since I did
Here I go,
People say, "Misery loves company"
But even though I'm not miserable
Why does it feel like I'm going through some type of
misery,
My body feels weak
I'm tired of relationships
I feel like I'm happy
But then again what would I know
I'm not even sure
You're probably reading this saying
"Damn this girls above"
But you know what it's always all good
But before I go let me say this
We choose what we do and we choose what we say
So if we are able to choose all those things
what makes us think we can't choose the right way
Wow... words of knowledge

-No Name

From The Beat: Words of knowledge, indeed! This poem is good. We particularly like the simile in the beginning and the knowledge offered at the end. You're absolutely right, you choose what you do and say. Life is all about choices. The hard part is making the "right" choices and living with the consequences when we make decisions. Or maybe the hard part is making the "wrong" choices and then having to live with those consequences while figuring out a way to make better choices. It's not always easy to choose the right way, but, as you've already noted, you can.

Change Is Up To You

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Bianca. I'm 15 years old and been in Alameda County Juvenile Hall for five months.

I read your piece Lovely & Cold. Now let me tell you, living in the Bay has nothing to do with the actions you make. If you want to change, then you yourself have to make that happen 'cause nobody else can make that happen for you.

Me personally, I'm a straight G. I don't believe in change. That'll be going all out. But that's me. I'm a person who likes to make a difference and help out in any way I can. So...remember your life and destiny is in your hands. Make the right choice. Stay up and remain solid. Nice poem by the way.

Yours truly,

-MJ

From The Beat: You know, Bianca, you may not believe in change, but change happens whether you believe in it or not. You are setting yourself up for long stretches of time as a slave to this system of controls that's just waiting for you to mess up again. We know you don't see it yet, but we hope you figure out how the system is designed to trap you by your own actions — before you spring that trap. If not, we're afraid you'll be writing some sad pieces from behind thick walls that you wish you had done things differently. Or, maybe you like living under someone else's thumb.

Life Is What You Make It

Life is not a game, unless you make it one. You only live one time, so why not live it up and make fun of it?

You can't walk around all depressed, because life will pass you by in a heart beat, before you know it. Get all you can get, and what you want you can do. But stay on the look-out for haters, because they're all around you. Make it yo' job to get it all.

-Tall Mike

From The Beat: It's sad to see you writing this coming from the Y on your way to freedom. Sometimes you have to go through a period of depression when you're facing up to some of the things you've done in the past. It's part of a process. Refuse to go through it, and the fun you plan on having, will only get you locked up again — and you know that's no fun!

Fair Trade

I would give up my drug of choice to gain the respect back from people and my family. Also I should have listened to what my man had to say, 'cause now I see that I should've listened to him from the beginning, 'cause now look at the place I am sitting at now.

If I would've listened to him I probably wouldn't be going through what am going through now. If I could go back in time and do what he told me to do I would, but I can't and that's sad. But that's it Beat. Gone.

-Chatita

From The Beat: We can't go back into the past and change things, but we can learn from our past to create a better future. You have to move forward and that means that you have to learn from your mistakes and apply the lessons you've learned to your future. It's nice to think that if you had listened to your boyfriend, none of this would have happened, but it's not your boyfriend or any other person who is responsible for telling you what's right and what's wrong. You have your own voice inside of you telling what's right from wrong. That's the voice you have to listen to. Respect takes time to regain, but we're sure that your family will respect you again if you act respectfully. We wish you would change that verb tense from "would give up my drug of choice" to "WILL give up my drug of choice..."

Me For My Queen

Que tranza Beat? Como estas en la vida? Well, I hope all is "gangsta" and you all is keeping your nose clean. Well, the topic I'm writing on tonight is: "Something I would give up for something I lost."

To keep it real with you, there is only one person in particular that I am thinking about. I would give my life for the life of my grandma, my love, my queen. Since my queen been gone, I have lost the love for people and the respect for another being's life. That is what I would give back, plain and simple.

Rest In Peace, "Nan" Elsie M. Thompson. Lil' C-Nut from San Leandro is out. Alratos.

-Lil' C-Nut

From The Beat: It is devastating to lose that one person in your life who represents everything good and loving, the one who taught what good is and what love is. But now what you can give, plain and simple, is to live your life the way she would want you to live it. Why not give her what she always wanted from you?

I'm Not Changing

What's up with it Beat? This the one and only savage MJ! Well this is in response to when you told me to "look around me," that this is "jail." Well Beat, straight up, Beat, I don't consider this jail! This to me ain't nothing! I don't take this seriously! How can I? To me Juvenile hall (at least this one) is a joke! If this is supposed to help rehabilitate me...umm...it ain't working.

I've made a decision, I'm not gonna let this lil' time change me! I know at first I was talking about change and how I was gonna do this and do that but that was just jail talk. 'Cause really as soon as I hit the streets I'ma be the same old Bianca and if anybody got a problem with that then they can step they game up 'cause all I'm gonna do is knock 'em back down. Well Beat, I'm out.

-MJ

From The Beat: Well, Bianca, it's your life and if you choose to spend significant portions of it as a slave, answering to strangers, then that's your choice. And believe me, if you are down for your game, you can bet the system is down to detain you. If "the same old Bianca" thinks that she can do the same old thing without paying the same old prices (except those prices get harder and harder each time), then Bianca is still a little girl who needs to mature. You way "if anybody had a problem with" you going back to the streets to do what you always do, they can "step up game." Well, when the system steps up game, you're the one who will feel the pain.

Dear Beat

This Saria from 150 crew Unit 2. All this will be my last piece in here 'cause I get out on Friday, March 17 and I'll be 18, so I really have to get it together so I can be on it. And handle my stuff. So may y'all still keep coming to write with kids 'cause this is what makes your time go by faster. So thank you.

-Saria

From The Beat: Saria, we are thankful that we have the opportunity to come and work with so many talented and bright young people, like you. But we hope that one day there isn't a need for The Beat. Can you imagine that? What if kids everywhere were staying in school, saying no to drugs, not killing one another, not stealing, or all of the other things that lead young people here. We want to thank you, Saria, because without you and all the "yous" who write in our pages, there would be no Beat at all.

Crime

What drew me to crime? Shhh, I was seeing my older cousins bust heads and get fast money, so I wanted to do it. I wanted the latest gear and the latest cars. And my life is dedicated to this life.

-Kudah Black

From The Beat: Maybe you were too young to see the price they would have to pay for that life. And where are the people your older cousins were looking up to? In prison? Dead?

How I Feel

I would give up the fast life for freedom. I would change my life, stop taking family for granted, if I beat this case. If I beat this life sentence, I'm out — and all the people I have beef with, won't have to worry about me.

I'm just wishing I get out, but I'm gon' keep it solid. RIP to all those home folks that was lost in the struggle. Life is precious, so make something of it. But the fallen ones are missed by us all and will always be missed. I'm gon' be up there with y'all someday, but until then, I'm gon' keep it solid. Watch over me.

I'ma keep praying every night. As of right now, I only got three ninjas in here with me from my 'hood. And one of 'em leaving tomorrow, and the other two soon probably. But I'ma keep it solid and beat this case. And I'm gon' keep praying and try to keep these tears from fallin' — but shhh is stressful and hard!

-Wayne

From The Beat: That promise you make at the beginning of this piece is deep. It has spiritual power that will lift your nightly prayers to heaven's gate with the speed of light! Nothing gets the attention of the Lord of Love than a promise to do right and to show mercy and forgiveness just as you pray for God's forgiveness and mercy. But now if you want to avoid future violence, you'll have to do more than just drop old beefs — you'll need to get your education so you can get a legal job and lift yourself up off the street grind forever. If you lie down with dogs, you have to expect to get fleas. It doesn't mean you stop loving the living or the dead from the streets of your 'hood, but it does mean you trade a life of crime for doing worldly good.

Short And Sweet

Love is only true
When it's with you
I love you Ness
Love, MJ

-Mj

From The Beat: Aw. Could you possibly write more next time? We have a whole hour with you. Like, maybe you could tell us what's so special about her

If you want to change, then you yourself have to make that happen

A Day In The Life

I remember one time I was riding in a stolo. I didn't have anywhere to go 'cause my boyfriend was locked up, right, and plus it was 6:30 a.m. and of course everyone was asleep so... I hit my connect up and told 'em to meet me at the 'hood park. Dude came through and I got what I wanted and bounced out. By that time it was 7:15 so I decided I was gonna hit up my school and see what was crackin' up there (Hayward High).

I hopped on the freeway and got off. (Now at this time I was on the run. I had three warrants out for my arrest. I was on the traffic light by McDonalds when out the cuts two police cars appeared. By the way, the stolo was a Toyota Camry and y'all know those are hot! One got on my right side and the other on the back of me. So I played it cool. If there's one thing I learned it's NEVER let 'em see you sweat. So at that moment I was thinking, if they blurt me, I'm gonna high speed in this 'Yota. You guys are probably wondering why don't you just pull over? But see I wasn't gonna go out like no sucka. Hell no! Yeah that would've been another charge, plus the many other ones. Grand theft auto, running a red light, running a stop sign, wreckless driving etc. But I didn't care.

The light turned green and I was prepared. I turned left towards the library, expecting to hear the siren. I must've been touched by an angel 'cause I never heard the siren. The car made a u-turn while the other kept on straight toward the school. After that I made a u-turn and headed toward my destination. Later that day, around 11:45 a.m. (lunch time) I picked up two broads and three homeboys. They looked like sardines in the back. Me and my homeboy rode in the front comfortably. Another homeboy from the other side thought he was riding in the front with me. Ha ha ha, that shhh was funny. He thought I was gonna let my homeboy ride in the back all squeezed and shhh. He got me effed up.

But um, anyways, back to my story. We headed towards the Hayward plunge. I burned the blunt and the other broads burned an eighth and dropped fade two on my gas tank so I wasn't even trippin' feel me. After we was done with the eighth (in less than two hours), my homeboy and the broad went to the bushes. Then after that we was on our way back up the hill to Hayward High School for some people up there ends at 1:30. So we got there just in time I dropped 'em off and picked up a new bunch. I was high as shhh. But I wanted to get high—ER!

You guys are probably wondering if you're so high how can you drive? That's the thing — I can't high or sober. Well truth be told, I drive a lil' better high than sober. Just a little though! As I was driving down the hill I saw another black and white. I was sure this time it was going down. I was hoping his light turned green before mine did. I told everybody in my car that they better be ready to hop out the car as soon as I pulled over so I could speed off. I had four people riding in my car: two females and two homies. What made it even hotter was that the homies were flamed up.

The light turned green I turned left and as I passed him the car squirted. All hope that I had before of me getting away was gone. I was thinking of all the dope I had just copped and the nina I had just received. I was slipping majorly thanks to Mary Jane. But I was still not going out like a sucker! I must've been touched by another angel because the cop never came after me. So that made me feel confident. I for some reason thought I was unstoppable. But that's just me, that's how I think all the time.

So we went to the park close to the police station. They burned me out with four blunts because they ran out of swishers. I told 'em don't trip, I'll go buy some swishers. Before I pulled off, I received a call from a homeboy who had a bottle of XO, a pint of Hennessy and some erk and jerk. Did I mention an eighth of grapes. My preference on the outs was both so as soon as he told me a beazy I foxed with was there, I didn't hesitate. I bounced.

And yes this is basically what a regular day for me is like. Smoke and drink all day, baby. Oh, and by the way, being in the hall turned me straight 'cause there are nasty girls in here. I thought I would've came out lesbian.

But anyways, I got to his spot, left around 8:45. I would've stayed longer but I had business to handle. When everything was gone (dope and nina) I turned my phone back on and it was 10:52. I had more than a dozen new messages, but I didn't bother to listen to any of 'em. I hopped on the freeway and headed toward Hayward. When I was on the freeway my cell started ringing. It was my homegirl. I didn't pick up 'cause she was probably calling to talk about B.S. You know: her boyfriend, clothes, girl stuff, ya know. So I decided I was gonna hit her up later.

Then as soon as it sopped ringing it started ringing again. This time it was my homie from Berry. He wanted to burn me out and you know me I never turn down no bomb. So I asked where he was at. He said he was in Union City at the theatres. As soon as he said that I knew he didn't have no ride so I told him it would cost him. Instead of one he ended up burning three. By the time we got out of the parking lot it was around 12:00 a.m. and it was a weekday and the parking lot was nearly empty except for maybe five or six cars. So as I pulled out I had to wait at the stoplight again and guess who I saw? Yup, the black and white. I had to turn left again. There was a divider and I drove over it. I think God was watching over me 'cause that was the third time throughout the day that I did something stupid in a stolo and not get taken to the hall for it. So let's just call it my lucky day.

—Bianca

From The Beat: You know, Bianca, you say you were going to a high-speed chase if the cops stopped you because you weren't going out "like no sucker," but the fact that you were riding around in someone else's car (that, unlike you, they worked hard to get the money to pay for) already makes you a sucker in our eyes. You can boast all you want about how you're down for this lifestyle, but all we see is a child determined to have her own way, regardless of anyone else's rights. That's a child for sure. Touched by an angel? No, we don't think so. No angel would let you ignore three warrants, steal a car, drive recklessly, smoke and drink and stay behind the wheel, etc. Anyone who thinks she drives better stoned than sober needs some protection from herself — as everyone else on the road (like us) needs to be protected from you! Your mind is stuck in childhood; it just has not matured along with your body. Even though you're now stopped dead in your tracks, you still think of yourself as unstoppable! We know that telling you to grow up won't do the trick, but we sure hope that you grow up before you have to do that from behind bars in a women's prison. Not fun at all!

Bein' Me

me, myself, i don't gang bang just to hang, i like to stunt get to shine and do my thang be with my little sexy honey out on the spot, gettin' money on the real it ain't nothin' funny i'm smart but i ain't dummie i got a son to bring up in this life every day i tell him it's all right before he go to sleep at night while young ninjas out there tryin' to earn they' stripes, to be down with a click that don't really need them around it's hard in oaktown, it ain't no game you think you livin' this life, thinkin' it all the same so you better keep lookin' over yo' shoulder because this game is never over

—Terrell

From The Beat: You can't bring your son "up in this life" — 'cause the life you're living only goes down. You say that every night you tell your son everything's all right — but it's a lie. Here you are locked down inside with no honey, no money, and your son on the out with no daddy anywhere about. Maybe you tell yourself this is just for a minute and then you'll be back up in it. Your son needs a father ready to be a man, make a legitimate plan to get out of a game that in the end brings nothing but pain to generation after generation. Your son deserves better than a father who can only send him an occasional letter with a PIN (prisoner identification number) — the game needs to be over for him before it takes him under. It's all on you. Wha'chu gonna do?

Makes Me Happy

Gettin' a visit from my parents makes me happy. Talking to girls brightens my spirit, and being with the family at home. Kickin' it with my brother, having a good time, brings out the good in me. Being released from Juvi will make me really happy.

—Arthur

From The Beat: Just reading your piece lifts our spirits a bit. Now when you're out, make sure you stay out by going legit.

I Don't Listen

My problem is — I don't listen. I might try, but I will just forget or not want to pay attention. I hear the shhh people tell me, the good advice they try to give me, and I even agree, but I just don't do it.

—Big Vic

From The Beat: Again, you sound just like an addict. Maybe you should go to NA meetings and say you're addicted to crime, or trouble, and you need a program and sponsor to help. Of course, if you use drugs (including alcohol) that could be the crucial problem.

Start Again

If I could get a fresh start, I would start by striking my enemies before they get me. I would be more slick in the streets, go different places, avoid certain people.

The crimes I did, I don't regret.

I only regret getting caught by the cops. I would choose different girls to be with, and keep my enemies closer. I also would try to make money instead of spending it on drugs and alcohol, at least not as much.

—Arthur

From The Beat: It's sad that you can't even imagine a world without enemies — our topic specifically said you get to start over in a world without enemies! And your plan to get them first is like voluntarily choosing to be cursed — in fact, it's more like a mutual suicide pact. Use this time to start thinking better, or your life only gets worse — inside or out! Without those changes we make this bet: You'll be caught again, and again regret!

Problem

The problem is, they got me in here for some bull! But know I'm gonna handle mine.

—Kudos Black

From The Beat: We've watched you "graduate" from unit to unit till now you're in max. You're not handling your choices well.

Do Yo' Time

Do yo' time and stay solid. You'll be out soon, don't trip. Time will reveal, just know that. They can't hold you down forever. It's hard, I know, when you' around fake ninjas and people who be frontin' and lying all the time. Just keep 'em where you can see 'em. Don't let 'em get close though.

I mean, if you get sent to a placement, just pimp it. I know it's hard, but you got to pull through it. My potna been to two placements and did both of 'em. But if you wanna run, then run — you gon' get caught sooner or later. It seem' like the system setting us up to fail. They put my potna, Laron, on EM, knowin' damn well he can't stay in the house for a month!

We gotta outsmart the system, like I did. I been here sixteen times and ran from five group homes and Camp; been to every unit and still ain't touched YA. Today is Tuesday, and I go home on Thursday. I pimped the system! That's what I did do! I'm tired of seeing potnas go down. We suppose' to be out living it up, on dubbz, painting the town, gettin' ready fo' the summer! 'Cause the Hall ain't it. Trust me, I know.

To all still in here, do yo' time. You' be back in a minute! I leave tomorrow. Y'all step up to the plate and quit hiding behind the umpire.

—Lil' Eddie

From The Beat: Oh, Eddie. You've been given chance after chance, and you call that "pimping the system". How many times did you pray to God to get out? And now that you're getting out, where does the praise go? To yourself, the same self who keeps getting himself sent back here — sixteen times! Sixteen times and you still refuse to learn your lesson. What you need to be doing is finishing up your secondary education and getting yourself a job so that this is not your last summer of freedom for more than a minute. The advice you're giving here is bad advice, designed to flatter your ego, to make you feel like you're "big pimpin'" — while you're wasting yet another chance at getting your life together in the free world. We're truly disappointed, only because we care about you and want to see you stay alive and free, but you just refuse to see.

Forget ROP

Beat! What it do? What it don't do! Dis ya boy Lil' Cez, coming from max. Man, my PO trying to send me to ROP (Rites of Passage), but i can't go out like that dough! Feel me?

I been here for three months, going through it! Now don't this sound stupid? My PO going to send me to four interviews for group homes, and then pick ROP? What type of trash is that? Ain't that about it?

She trying to play a ninja, but you know what I am go' do? I am going to refuse it on her. Then, she going to say if I refuse ROP, then she going to send me to the Y (California Youth Authority). Man! What a ninja gon' do?

-Lil' Cez
From The Beat: It sounds like those four group homes that interviewed you also refused to take you. Was it something you said to them? Having to choose between ROP and CYA though, is pretty much a no-brainer, don't you think? Is Camp out of the question because of your charge? Or did you already run from Camp? Wherever they put you, the answer to all your problems is on you — how you think and what you choose to do.

My Problems

Wussup with it Beat? This is Lil' Peru from Redwood City. Well my problem is that I can't wait till I get out and I can't be without my family. Being without my family is like a dead man listing to a radio; he can't hear it.

My other problem is being in the gangs, 'cause my mom always tells me to get out of gangs, but I can't get out. I think my mom is trying to move to another state so I can't stay in gangs no more. My brother and sisters don't wanna go to another state, so that's my problem.

Whoever got a problem, talk to somebody 'cause I do talk to somebody, and that's my homeboy. All right then Beat, I'll write.

-Lil' Peru
From The Beat: Lil' Peru, what do you think would be best for you? Pretend you are 30 years old and you are looking back at your life now — what do you think is the best decision? Will moving out of state get you out of a gang? What is preventing you from getting out? Where does your first love and loyalty reside, with your gang or with your mother? Who deserves more respect? And if you don't get out — then what? Where will you be when you are 30 years old?

What Is Your Problem?

My problem is that most people do stupid things, like run from Camp or a group home when it's dumb. Just pimp dat shhhh!

-Kheim
From The Beat: Yeah, you're right. Why are people so dumb? Maybe it's the trend to "Go Dumb", that's got everyone doing it. Hmm... Seriously, why do you think people run from their group homes, even when they have only a little time left to do?

What Drew Me To Crime

The main thing that draws me to a crime is money. Money is the main thing I need, because my mommy don't give me money like that, and I need shoes and clothes. I don't wanna be walking around dirty. That is the main thing that draws me to crime. And I have to support my weed habit.

-Roderick
From The Beat: Supporting your weed habit is a lot more expensive than you think. If you're stealing bread because you're hungry, that's one thing. But if your money is for things you can do without, like weed, then we just don't see how you can justify risking your freedom (and losing). You have a future. Think about what you want it to be. The choices you make today will determine the future you live tomorrow.

Fair Trade

I lost my freedom and to get it back I would do damn near everything. Not nothing gay and not snitching, but everything else.

-Kheim
From The Beat: We gotta laugh at this one! If you use your brain — all you got to do is... stop breaking the law!

County Sinning

Q-Vo Beat? This Slick coming at ya from max, dropping down these lifas here, letting time fly, holding my grounds, kicking back with the homeboys, just doing our thang — county sinning. You feel? Well, I just want to send my love to all my loved ones. Keep your heads up. Till pencil meets paper. Alrato.

-Slick
From The Beat: Do you ever read this part? 'Cause we've told you before that you're just wasting this time if all you're doing is passing the time. Prepare your mind, heart and soul to stay free if you are blessed with freedom. Go back out with the same old mind, you'll catch another case and be back doing time. The same is true whether it's weeks, months or years till you are again free and clear.

Touched In The Beat

Yo, what's up? It's your boi Jesse aka Reese! Just want to throw out some words to this girl about her writing in The Beat. I read what she wrote and she touches on notes that I see myself going through.

So I just want to say to Bianca — girl, you on your game! And thank you for what you write about. I'll keep writing to The Beat, too, about what I did, what I do and what I'm planning to: how I felt, how I feel and how I hope to improve.

-Reese
From The Beat: Dropping props where they're due to Beat writers is coo' as long as you're writing about writing, and not trying to find a new boo.

To The Girl I Love

Sometime at night
I wonder how I can be with you
It's because I hustle and grind
I get money
To care for you
It just might be the love in my heart
I got for you
I look at the wall
Cry to myself
When I think of you
It's hard
Not being with the one
You know that's really down for you
Just might cry too
And I feel it dude
I can't keep putting my boo through this
Or my family
When I get out
It's time to turn my life around
And who ever read this
You need to feel me.

-Young D-Nutz
From The Beat: We feel you. Love is powerful. How much would you be willing to sacrifice for this relationship? You're right, you can't keep putting people you love through this without finally concluding that you love something else more than you love them...

If I Could Start Over

Wassup, The Beat Within! Well, if I could start over, if I was to go to sleep and wake up tomorrow with no record at all — I would just walk outside and just kick it with no worry of police gettin' on my back ... just smokin', no problems. I would be with my mom, chillin' at da house, loaded. Well, dis is all for right now till pencil meets paper.

-O'Btrice
From The Beat: How long would that last? A week? You need to have a plan to bring in some money, and if you don't make a plan to get a job, you know you'll just go back and sling and rob. And unless you've already got someone to hook you up with a good job, you'll also need to get your GED, so you can get a job that pays decently. Fail to plan, and you plan to fail.

Life Once Again

If I had a chance to start my life all over, I actually wouldn't. Everything that has happened to me over these past couple of years, made me who I am today.

I have learned a lot about myself while being incarcerated. It has helped me grow as an individual and helped me realize that I don't want to be here. It showed me all the people who really cared! All of my so-called homies on the outs don't write. There are only a couple of homies holdin' it down.

Also my girl, she writes t me every single day, even if I don't get them till hella later. She been here for me since day one. It has also shown me not to take my parents for granted. They visit me every visiting day, go to every court day, and support me in every way possible.

Me being incarcerated, my enemies, the crimes I committed, have all made me who I am today, and I would not start anything over. I am grateful for my past, and I know I won't make the same mistake twice.

-Big Vic
From The Beat: Actually, our topic said that you could keep what you've learned from your life as you've lived it, but have a chance to get out with a clean slate — no record, no enemies, no homies asking you to ride with them, etc. But you know what? If you really have learned from your mistakes, and you plan not to make the same type of mistake all over again, it amounts to the same thing; but it's harder 'cause you will be tempted and tested. Just hold on tight to what you've learned through all this, and you'll be blessed.

My Homeboy

Wussup with it Beat? This is Lil' Peru from Redwood City. And I'm hella mad 'cause one of my homeboys is here now. Why homeboy, why did you do the shhh? I told you to stay out of trouble, but you didn't listen to your homeboy, homie.

Homie, I hope you stay cool up in here and just do what they tell you 'cause you finna be here for hella long and they may send you to the pen. So homie, stay out of trouble in max. Do good in here and you will get out.

I hope you read this homie and I hope we go back to San Mateo homie. So be cool and stay out of trouble. This is for all the homeboys that are locked up — or on the outs.

-Lil' Peru
From The Beat: Lil' Peru, why doesn't anybody listen and learn from the mistakes that others make? Was there something that someone could have said to you that would have saved you? How can we, as a community save all the lil' homies that don't listen? The ones that continue to make the same mistakes we made, and then some? We hope your homeboy takes your excellent advice to heart.

What It Do?

What it do Beat? As for me, shhh posting in these grimy walls, keeping heads up through this BS. I seen my girl in church and she gave me a messed up look. I don't know wassup, but I still love her and wanna be with her.

I wanna say wassup to my patnas and the rest of my family in these walls doing time, feel me. And I wanna say, I love my mom and grandma and my sister, feel me.

I got to court on the 23rd, but I know I'm not going home. I got to keep my head up.

-Lil' Atam
From The Beat: Relationships are hard to manage, especially, when both of you are in the Hall. Both of you need to kick each other in the butt to get your lives together. We believe you when you say you love your mom and grandma, but words are far less important than deeds. If you truly love them, then you have to find a way to give them what they want and deserve — namely, you, home and free! Keep your head up and keep your eyes open for a better life. What's out there?

I Would Give Up Anything

The person that I will give up anything to bring back is my brother. He plays a big part in my life. We always used to fight and talk about each other, but now that his gone, I wish that we can talk about each other again.

-Roderick

From The Beat: We are sorry you have to deal with the loss of your brother. As long as you live, so will he. Which means we hope that you figure out a way to stay alive and free so you will not be just a memory for someone else to write about. Cherish your memories of your brother, and respect him by respecting yourself and your freedom!

A Few Thoughts

When I get out of Juvenile Hall I am going to try my best to not commit any crimes. One thing I'm sure I'm not going to do is use drugs or have any drugs on my passes.

If I could bring someone back I would bring my girlfriend back. I would give my up anything to bring my girl back to this world.

-Omar

From The Beat: Good for you Omar. What is trying your best? When it comes to not committing crimes, it's a question of doing it or not doing it. What do you plan to do? Are you strong enough to say no, when everyone else is saying yes? Or are you smart enough to not put yourself in that situation? Hmm....

My Life: From Bad to Good

My life has went from bad to good in as little as four months up here at Camp! It might seem like I'm playing, but I'm not.

The reason why I say that, is because at first I didn't go to school, and now I'm taking my GED. And at first I was always smoking, and now I'm not. And I sometimes took money from people, but now I work for mine.

This is Young Arlan Baby, and I'm keeping it real. If Judge K send you to Camp, come! 'Cause it's better up here than behind closed doors. But at home is the best — so if someone brings this issue of The Beat home from the Hall, read it! It might save your life. (Love Stank.)

-Young Arlan Baby

From The Beat: You have come a long way. We see it and we respect it. Those are some giant strides toward changing your life permanently for the better. Of course, your progress can't end with your program. You still have to take it back outside with you. With a GED in your pocket (whether you pass it this time or next), and your intelligence and ability, all you need do is stay committed to finding and keeping a job — and put some distance between you and the mob or crew or block or team. You're looking good and ready to pursue a higher dream!

Little Brother

young one, slow your roll
i know you wanna be like me
but do it the right way
you want grills, money and broads
but get it the clean way
be legit in your own way
don't be the next man's shadow
that's dumb
have your mind right
and yo' game tight
'cause once you have that
ain't no breaking you
ninjas wanna hate
let 'em hate
snatch 'em broads for the night
and let 'em hate you for life
make 'em cry for nights
momma didn't raise no fools
so make her proud
learn from my mistakes
and you'll stay safe

-Mien G-Money

From The Beat: The problem is when he sees what you do, and he already wants to be like you, it doesn't matter too much what you say, especially if you hide the pain that comes along with the game 'cause you can't drop your guard. If you really want him to be safe, show him how you, too, can do it even after your time in the game. Do what? Make your momma proud of you! Don't just tell the truth, live it, too! Otherwise his mind will still say, "But look at you!"

Fair Trade

What would I call a fair trade to bring my brotha back? Changing my personality and negative behaviors by like not fighting, not going to school and start being the Lil' Solid I used to be - back to playin' ball. But RIP Christian, we miss you big brotha. If I could bring him back, I would not be here.

-Lil' Solid

From The Beat: Lil' Solid, you can't bring Christian back, but, what you can do is respect his memory by respecting yourself. If you keep yourself alive and free, you will also preserve the memory of him that lives within you. Make some changes in your life, so that someone won't be in your shoes, thinking about what they would trade to bring you back.

Trife Rude

my life is trife
i feel this way
fast forward life
rewind and play
devil want' me dead
and kill the day
so i run with god
and still i pray
enough for me
to touch the "beat"
i survived luckily
"within" the five-speed
i clutch my feet
and get money productively
at times when i touch the street
my heart could stop
the rush asleep

-Lyfe

From The Beat: We'll let it pass this time, but no more "Trife Rude" in our pages. Representing turf only makes matters worse for all those locked in cages. On the level, it's the spirit of the devil and his divide-and-conquer strategy getting played out in the streets for all to see. Spit a positive spirit so others can hear it and "run with God" — but on God's team you do more than just pray: by your example, show others the way!

Convicted Felon

i am a convicted felon
because i committed crimes
too many dope cases
had to survive on my own
it was either robbin' ninjas
for five, ten, fifteen
or servin' them knocks
guaranteed money
but ya play with ya freedom
life is a game
until you get checkmate
and it's "game over" ninja
when i turn eighteen next year
i'm a still do the same thing ninja
ninja life is a game
only the strongest survive

-Lil' E

From The Beat: It's not about being strong, it's about being smart. And you can see where you're headed right from the start with the game you've been playing. Your criminal money is anything but free, 'cause look at the penalty you're paying. Camp is a chance to turn it around, or you can keep digging a deeper hole in the ground, till they bury you six feet or lock you up and throw away the key. Lil' E! Wake up to reality. Change games.

My Problem Is

My problem is seeing that money come fast
My problem is doing the same shhh
My problem is livin' that street life
My problem is going to get solved
My problem is tryin to ball
My problem is thinking I know everything
But like I said my problem will get solved.

-Charter

From The Beat: Well, you've done a great job of listing those problems you say will get solved. But just saying it doesn't convince us. How?

Felonies

I committed crimes because I needed some money. I think it was the influence of my cousins and homeboys that made me commit felonies.

When I graduate from Camp Sweeney, I'm'a keep it coo' because I'm have a YA commitment — that's if I do another crime and get locked up. But I'm going to go straight, so I can be with my family. Then, when I get out, I'm'a go to a community college, so I can get a good job.

Yup! I'm'a put my grown man on! Late.

-Jr

From The Beat: While you're responsible for what you choose to do, it is equally important to recognize "triggers" and "slippery situations" so you can avoid both. A "trigger" is something that sets you off, in this case, to committing felonies. A "slippery situation" is you kicking it with your cousins when you're in need of money. You've got a great plan! Now see it through. Props.

My Aunt

If I could bring back someone I would bring back my Aunt Maurie because she was a strong woman. Also she was one of my favorite auntie.

-Freddie

From The Beat: What's your favorite memory of her? Why was she so special to you? What would she want you to be doing with your life?

What a Day!

What a day it was yesterday, man! Just yesterday, somebody started fighting up here at Camp. Man, some people start stuff but don't like to back it up.

They just started off talking about each other. Then they started talking about each other's mother. At first they were playing, but then they wanted to take off to the fullest. I was there, at first, before they got into it, and they stopped. So I walked off right quick.

When I came back, they were already chunkin' 'em. I was like, "Damn!" And the staff came and broke it up. So, unfortunately, they both went to Juvenile Hall. They both got "incident" write-ups. I was like, "I guess they both must learn their lessons." Now they must learn how to keep they' cool and not blow it. Late.

-Brainiak

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing the story. Yes, it's a shame they both got sent back to the Hall. Let's hope they get another chance at Camp. That fighting and testing is just acting a fool, 'cause it can start out as play and end up not at all cool. Why do folks at Camp have to be that way, repping and fronting till tempers get frayed. Well, what else can you do, but turn your knowledge to wisdom, stay cool, and keep on being you.

Give It Up

I would give up all the drugs for my freedom so I can't wake up every day and night and can't see none of my brothers or my sister even my father and my mother. So that's what I'll give up for freedom!

I would give up my gang related stuff, for my family or just to be with them. I love my family!

-Jason

From The Beat: Then do it! What are you waiting for! Don't say "would" say "will." If you allow yourself to be taken from your family, then maybe you love drugs and gang-related stuff more...

My Crime

I don't know why I committed my first crime, but more important is that I never catch on! I keep on getting caught, but still do it!

Now I know I have to stop, 'cause if I don't stop — I go to the next step in the system. This is my last chance! I think it's because of friends that we keep doing this stuff, and the friends never last.

-Chantha

From The Beat: There is definitely a youth sub-culture, call it thugging or "keeping it gangsta" or whatever, that has friends encouraging each other to take stupid risks for criminal gain. You seem to get away with it so often, but then get caught and the price tag for that "free money" keeps going up. Quit and go legit.

Nothing Seems Real

My heart is filled with hate and not much love.

For I was once hurt and saw darkness above,

No one was around, and I needed a hug.

Though I never had my family I was missing some love.

I am messing up

And they livin' it up.

For some reason a part of me got stuck and I could not see.

I could not feel

Someone bring me back to life 'cause nothing seems real.

I count my days on a sheet

Hoping that day will come that we meet.

To them it's so close but to me it's so far away.

Yup March 17 why can't you be today?

I've had a long time to think and somehow I feel I am not ready.

I am not ready to live alone,

I am not ready to be on my own,

I am not ready to be grown.

But I act like it and now it's my time to be it!

And I will make it?

-Saria

From The Beat: Saria, growing up is a hard thing to do. We go from being little girls to women, and suddenly all of these expectations are placed on us. It's unfortunate that there is no handbook or guide for us to follow. Thinking about taking care of ourselves and being responsible for all of our decisions can be overwhelming. But we think you're more mature and more ready than you know. Part of being an adult is knowing when to say no, and we hope you feel ready to say it because you're going to have to say it to stay out of here. If you begin to make good decisions for Saria, it won't be a question of whether you will make it. You will.

Taking Care Of My Brothers Led Me To Crime

What drove me to my crime was when I was 11 years old and I was left with my five brothers at home. I had to find a way to take care of them, so I went to working on the streets. That was the best money I have ever made. It was like clockwork. Yes, I plan on changing because by doing that for so long that I haven't been going to school. I plan on going back to school and making my life better.

-Shunt

From The Beat: What happened when you were eleven that forced you to take on such a major responsibility of caring for your family at such a young age? We are sure that most people would have done whatever it took to survive. You are very bright and very talented. We don't know much, but we do know that the best money comes without having to worry about whether you will be caught getting it. You are too smart to spend the rest of your life using your body to make money when you can use your mind. Believe that. The downside of what you did to take care of your brothers, though, is time in jail or the hall, and then who is taking care of them? Are you ready to leave your life of crime and go back to school?

Authority Makes Me Rebel

My reason for committing crimes is authority. I don't mind people having authority over me, but not when they take advantage of it. Taking bad advantage of authority is when a person comes up with a lot of strict rules that most people fail. Taking good advantage of authority is when a person follows the rules, but makes it easy for you have a good day.

I get irritated when people are constantly on my back about the stupidest things. That is why I rebel. If it continues, I'ma stay rebellious.

-Eugene

Form The Beat: You have keen insights about power, and how power corrupts. We like your idea about setting up rules that people can meet, rather than setting up people to fail. Which rules would you change, specifically for probation? On the same hand, we sometimes have to bend to rules we don't like just to keep from breaking, feel us?

Messed Up At a Young Age

What's up wit' it, Beat! This yo' boy, Lil' Man-Man. I'm going to tell you about me. I was born and raised in Oakland, California.

I stayed in West Oakland, and I stayed with my grandfather, RIP Larry Goitre. I used to mess up a lot of stuff of my grandfather when I was little and stuff. By the time I was six years old, I messed up about ten thousand dollars worth of stuff.

I used to be Bay-Bay Kid, and in my 'hood everybody had knew my name around. But that's all I got to say today. I'm gone.

-Lil' Man-Man

From The Beat: Thanks for telling us a little bit about yourself. It sounds like you grew up wild. Can you tame yourself when you need to, or do you still run out of control, even your own?

You!

It's amazing how you make me feel.

As if this is just a fantasy, not real.

You bring me warmth and comforting

You have me thinking I'm on something

Through messages and kites

You make me want you with the stuff you write.

I hardly even know you, but it feels like I've known you for a while.

You're close to me but yet it seems like miles.

You make me feel things I've never felt

And when I see you inside I feel I melt.

My heart skipped a beat

I turn flush and start sweating and it ain't the heat.

I can't wait till we both hit the street.

I'm a crazy chick, the craziest you'll ever meet.

When I get out we gon' do it live.

It's goin' down!

I'm not going to care who's around.

I got to keep in mind that we're just "friends."

Just the same way you're here for me I'll be here for you

Until the end.

Forever,

-MJ

From The Beat: MJ, you sound as if you have it bad for this person. Why is that you like her or him? How is it that you are able to feel so strongly for someone that you hardly know? It's amazing how when you really like someone the things that you feel on the inside start to show on the outside. Hands start sweating, faces are flushed, and hearts beat faster. Do you have the same effect on this other person? Just be a little careful with your emotions in case you're building more up in your mind than can be justified by reality...

RIP Momma

I would give my life back to my mom because that's my whole life right there. I loved her so much. She was everything a kid wanted.

-Larry

From The Beat: Nothing compares to the pain of losing a mother. Thank you for sharing your story with The Beat, and we hope you find ways to honor her every day — on our pages or elsewhere. You know how much she loved you and what she hoped for you. Can you give her that?

Why I Did What I Did

It was a late Friday night, and I was invited to a party. I was already buzzin' and enjoying myself when bottles started flying.

About two bottles hit me and the girl that was giving me a lap dance. The bottles got me and the jaina all soaked with beer, and that got me heated — and that was the cause of why I did what I did.

-Buzz

From The Beat: Hmm, you're already drunk and you go to a drinking party, and then you get so hot because other drunks get stupid that you get even more stupid than them. Was it worth it?

A New Day

today is a new day

sky so clear

locked up in camp

with nothing to do here

but if i run

that's a felony

don't do it

is what people are telling me

but soon i'll be released

well i better be

stress is not the way

think positive

everything will be okay

but i'm always thankful

for a brand new day

-Lil' Bra

From The Beat: Hey, your rhymes help pass the down time. And your wisdom helps yourself and others make better decisions. Take it one brand new day at a time, and you'll do just fine. And you won't be looking over your shoulder for five-oh to pull you over.

Graduation

I'm finally graduating high school!

I am so excited! I never thought I'd do it.

I'm glad that I've always looked at my education as very important.

I'm glad that on mornings when I had a hangover,

Or just wanted to go back to sleep

I made myself get up and go anyways.

I'm really proud of myself.

I kind of wish I could be graduating outside of Juvenile Hall

In a public school, but it's okay.

I'm just glad I'm graduating.

To everyone else who is in the class of 2006.

I'm proud of you.

We made it!

-Tiffany

From The Beat: Congratulations! Graduating high school is a major accomplishment. Now that you are a high school graduate what do you want to do? Have you thought about other things that you want to do or explore? We are very proud of you. (Wouldn't it have been a lot easier, though, if you didn't have to wake up with those hangovers?)

How I Feel

I feel angry and upset because I'm in the hall and my baby momma is stressed. If she has a miscarriage I'm going to be depressed because I put in work and wasted hella sweat just to see her get hella fat, get my money, then get more. So now I'm tired and want my girl so she can go stupid and pull my hair.

-Momo

From The Beat: Have some respect for this woman, Momo, and maybe she'll respect you. Really, the way you wrote this sounds like you've got no respect for her, or women in general, or frankly, for yourself. She's the one who should feel angry, because you have put yourself in the hands of the system just when she needed you most. It's time to stop thinking only of yourself...

It's Where I Was Raised

My name is T-Face and I commit crime because that's all it is where I was raised. I'm in here for a punk-ass probation violation. It's kind of hard to stop smoking when you been doing it for a long time, and everybody you know does.

But one thing I realized is that they are not playing when you're on probation. When they say stop doing something, they mean it. It will be very hard when I get out and have to tell people I quit smoking weed and drinking. In my 'hood, all they do is smoke and drink. All I know is crime.

But I know it's time to try to get my life on the right track and show the Alameda county police that I'm not who they think I am. I wouldn't be another black man in jail, or prison doing what the next man wants me to do. I got to be a role model for my little sisters Kelis an' Keyijana. Also my little cousin Yaya because he lost his dad and brother Jaburi.

-T-Face

From The Beat: You are so right, it will be hard not to do the things that "everybody" is doing when you touch down. But if you hate it here, then doing something hard seems worth it. We know it's not fair to ask you to do things that are easier for others to do because of where they come from, but fair or not, unless you make the changes the system demands of you (at least temporarily), you are the one who will pay the price, as you are right now. Your little sisters and cousin will thank you for setting an example for them that will keep them in school and out of the system. And you will be proud of yourself for dedicating yourself to something so important as saving the next generation.

Mad At The Beat

If I could trade something to get something back I would trade a blank piece of paper for the ones I gave the Beat before because they don't put my shhh in the damn Beat anyway. So if I could go back in time I would keep that hard working paper I gave y'all an' give you blank ones.

-Lil-C-M

From The Beat: We're so sorry you haven't seen your writings in The Beat. We hope you've just overlooked your pieces, but we will look and see why this is happening. Keep in mind we're on a three to four-week delay schedule, so it takes time. (What you're reading tonight was written four weeks ago!) Sometimes we don't print folks' pieces because they are just too scandalous or inappropriate for The Beat. It takes some courage to write and put yourself out there for all to read, so we hope you continue to do it.

Crime In My Life

In Oakland

I started doing crime

When I was nine I started having sex with girls

Then started playing with guns

Then started driving cars

Then I started to party, goin' dumb on ninjas

Then I started smoking weed and drinking

Then it was ripe for the street

I started getting money fast on the block

Then another happened

I started to pop Es

I wasn't scared of nothing

I start robbin' people by myself

I started shooting people

I had so much money for robbin' people and selling

dee

I start buying cars then Bs was on me all day every day

Then I start popping Es more and drinking

By then my nickname was M-A-T

It don't stop, it is more.

-Lil' Matt

From The Beat: More what? More drama? All this you describe with such pride is what has made you a slave of this little system — and one who seems willing to face even tougher slave quarters down the line. You say "it don't stop," but here you are, wearing someone else's drawes, taking showers with other boys, stopped dead in your tracks! Keep it real, Matt. Stop the game before it stops you.

Thizz Kids

Well I heard the Mac Dre song where he said if you pop a pill you don't have any feeling for nothing but sex. When I get off a pill I feel good about myself. It makes me feel like Superman, so that's why I commit crimes. Mac Dre said anybody can do the thizz dance. My favorite dance was the Harlem Shake until Mac Dre said forget the Harlem Shake, do the thizz dance.

-Hoochie

From The Beat: Hoochie, we all need people to admire, but you gotta start thinking for yourself. Mac Dre didn't have it all right or he'd still be with us today... The trouble with feeling like Superman is that you are not Superman, so you do things that you can't get away with, and end up locked up. If you were really Superman, you'd just walk out of here. It's time to start just being you, a person able to make decisions for himself — and then face the consequences of those decisions.

RIP Mezzy

I would give my life if I could see Armon again. I would do anything to just see him one more time. Everybody thinks they know him, and they say they love him. But they don't even know who he really was like my brother. He had my back and I had his. RIP Armon Dante Green.

-Darnell

From The Beat: We are so sorry for the loss of your good friend, Darnell. But it's important to recognize that "having his back" did not keep him from paying with his life. The only person that can really have your back is yourself. It's up to you whether you want to play this deadly game, or find something else that allows you to keep Darnell alive for a long time by keeping yourself alive for a long time.

RIP Meech

In December 2005 I was home

Hanging with my friends

I heard that Meech had passed

He got shot and killed

My sister was standing by him too

That could have been her that got killed

She was shot in the face and survived

Meech died, I didn't go to the funeral

That's why I want to see him one more time

because he got killed on the side of my sister

Always love you Meech.

-Grieving Friend

From The Beat: We've heard this young Meech's name in the Beat several times since he passed, so you are not alone in your grief over him. We are so glad you're sister is ok, and we hope you get out soon to help take care of your sister. Did this close call that almost took your sister from you make you want to do anything differently? Will you make some changes when you get out? What?

What Drew You To Crime?

I needed some money to pay my phone bill 'cause my parents didn't think I earned it. So I tried to go out and get my own money, but now I see where you could come to if you make bad decisions.

Now I know what path I'm going to go down when I get out of this place. Most people think it's a game to be in Juvenile Hall, but this is not how I want to live my lifestyle. When I get out I'm going to do everything the right way and try to show off these streets. I just pray to God and hope to get my freedom, which I lost.

-Lil' Moosa

From The Beat: Lil' Moosa, you seem to have got your mind right. But, once you get your freedom back, will you know how to keep it and not abuse it? Going back to school, even when it's boring, is a very good place to start. What changes do you see in your future?

Lost A Lot

Growing up in these streets I lost a lot, a lot of stuff I can't get back that nothing in this world can get back. I lost a lot of people, a lot of loved ones, a lot of family a lot of time, a lot of sleep, you feel me? I'm still wastin' time being in here.

When I get out it's back to the same me. Ain't nothing gonna change but the clothes on my back, shoes on my feet, money I'm gonna spend, pearls I'm gone save and it's gonna stay that way until they lay me six feet.

I take pride in what I do and I hope you do the same. It's been like this since I stepped in and that's the way I'm gone leave this game. "Thugging banging and ballin'." Forever thug life.

-Nino

From The Beat: So then, we guess you must be proud of being in the hall, controlled by strangers, since you take pride in what you do, and one of the things you do (and will keep doing) is get locked up. If you "ain't gonna change," then we hope you know the system ain't gonna change, either. So if you're prepared to be a slave for longer and longer periods of your life in dungeons that get darker and deeper, then go for it. The choice is yours.

Why I Go Dumb

I go dumb because I got two girls pregnant at one time. I'm goin' crazy 'cause they don't want to get an abortion and I don't want no dumb kid, so now I'm gone always be broke and I'm gone have to pay child support. If I could change something it would be me usin' a condom.

-Jd

From The Beat: You're right, J.D., it was irresponsible of you to bring two children into the world when you didn't want either — and both were preventable! We're proud you have the courage to speak your real fears, and your regrets — and that you've committed yourself to change. We also hope that you can embrace these babies with all the love they deserve, because they aren't asking to be born. Child support is one thing, but loving them is another. And doing a good job at the second one is harder, and lasts a lifetime.

Why I Ran

I ran from camp because that shhh hella fake. I saw 5-O so I did a quick shake only gone for three weeks, but I had fun.

-Momo

From The Beat: Wake up, Momo, and start thinking with the head on your shoulders, and not that other head that seems to lead you around. What matters is freedom, not sexual conquest. Unless, of course, you enjoy the sexual conquests that occur in every prison in the country. Time to wake up!

Grew Up In The Life

The reason I think I'm like this is because I grew up with a lot of people running from cops and hiding in my back yard. It was the ghetto. I grew up into thug life and things I do are habits not because I like to. It's because I grew up to this.

My grandma did as much as she could to help me to do good. She's trying to help me and I keep making mistakes and I regret doing this, but I can do my best to do good. I'm not gonna come back hopefully. And to all the homeboys be safe and stay out. Much love.

-Tommy

From The Beat: You've got to do some deeper thinking and planning about your situation, Tommy. We're sure you've said before that you hope you won't come back, but you weren't able to do it. So look carefully at what takes you away from your loving grandma, and concentrate on avoiding those things, whether it's your homies, the block, the blunt, or the bottle. Changing habits is never easy, but coming to the hall or to jail is a habit we hope you don't develop because the deeper you go down the hole, the harder it is to pull yourself out.

For the Money

What's up Beat and Beat readers. You know who this is, the boy known as Ob-trice, from Oakland. You see it! But anyways, what it do to all my fellow inmates locked down for some stupid shhh they could've stopped themselves from doing. That brings me to my topic of writing tonight: "What Drew Me to Crime?"

What drew me to commit my crime? My crime is one of those crimes that you can choose to do it or you can walk away. I think I did it for the money. It was the money. Money was on my mind at the time — but freedom is worth more than money! If I could go back, I would go back. So I pray to God that I get out soon. That's all for now, until pencil meets paper. Your boy from Oakland,

-Ob'trice

From The Beat: They say obsession and compulsion characterize addiction. You were obsessed with money (gettin' money), thinking about it all the time, until an opportunity presented itself which you could not resist even though you knew better — which is called compulsion. You couldn't stop yourself. But once you admit the addiction, you can no longer afford to trust your own judgment with regard to criminal means of gettin' money. Get a job if you want to keep your freedom, then you can have both money and freedom — fast money will bring you down.

Overnight

shooting dice ain't how

i got my ice

i put in hard work

and got my worth

overnight

ninjas tryin' a break me down

when they see me come up

but instead i ride by

and show 'em what's up

i'll snatch thei' girl and pair us up

let her run back and tell you what

-Mien G-Money

From The Beat: In this piece and the one to your brother, we feel your desire to shine with a girl by your side. But you talk like the girl is less real than the guy, just another possession to use or try. Nah, we know you're smarter than the next player bumping his gums. So we wonder why you don't give more respect to other women as you give to your moms.

Stayin' On Top Of Yo' Game

i'm trying to stay on top
and stand taller than twin towers
i gotta live for today

no tellin' what's gon' happen in an hour

i gotta focus on my destination

so i can be a man with wisdom and power

'cause no tellin' what's gon' happen

somebody can get you any day of the hour

you gotta stay on yo' feet

and you gotta live on top of yo' game

i'm tryin' a make it in life

get money and live with' all the fame

-Dada

From The Beat: If you're still chasing street fame, you're still lost in the street game. Man, your destination needs to be to have a decent life, so you children and grandchildren can speak of you with pride knowing you were always there to show them love instead of explaining why you're always on the inside. The only fame you need claim is in the hearts of the next generation that bears your name. Yeah, anybody could die in the next hour, don't use that as an excuse to be a coward and refuse the responsibility of being a man, as you say, holding "wisdom and power" you can — not the power of a gun, the power of living by a higher vision.

The Way I am

I think I am the way I am because when I was growing up my dad took me to his friend's house and party and they were all part of a gang. And because it's also where I live. A lot of people are in gangs there. My family is worrying and they are crying for me so I'm ready to give this up. If the court gives me a chance I'll give all things up. It'll be hard.

-E

From the Beat: Giving up anything is hard, so we admire your courage to try. Whether you get out right away or not, you will be back on the streets sooner or later, so now is the time to start thinking of what you want to do in order to stay with your family. You really need a plan. If you don't create one, the system will create one for you...

Back-Stabbing Best Friends (Part Two)

Man, back to what I was sayin' — that ninja cut on me. Now a ninja in Camp stress off of that real dough that's waitin' at the house. But see, I know that ninja, and he don't know where the stash at — so I still got that.

But what I was talkin' about in the last Beat was how that ninja cut on me and my lil' female, Treasure. You feel me? I think he left 'cause he really wasn't solid. That ninja left 'cause he didn't want to watch Treasure for me to keep stackin' that dough. Now you feel me? I got the family stackin' off of that pimpin' money.

I remember one time when we went on a high-speed chase from the five-oh. We was in West Oakland, and I hopped on the freeway to go back to the East on them. I got off on Thirty-fifth and Fruitvale, and when I got off, he told me to make a left, right, left, right, left, right. Then we ended up on High Street and Brookdale. So I just went towards the hills, and I left them. Then I had to park the car 'cause it was hot.

So the next week, I took it to the part shop and paint the car all white. So now we wasn't hot anymore. Well, that's all I got about that ninja until next week. Get ready for Part Three on that hittin' licks.

-Relly-bo

From The Beat: You're story is a clear case of can't see the forest for the trees. Have you ever heard that expression? In this case it means you're so caught up in looking at your best friend and how he betrayed you, it blinds you to the fact that the game is scandalous and evil. Like they say, "Don't blame the player, blame the game." Now we don't mean your friend isn't responsible for what he did, but you were out there exploiting this young lady you call "Treasure" — using her like a slave owner to make money for yourself, even though you assure us you aren't a "gorilla pimp", which makes you more like the slave owner who treats his slaves better than the next one while he denies them human dignity and the profit of their own labor; plus you're messing with a young lady's mind (and we've watched plenty of young ladies come in full of all that "pimp daddy" talk slowly return to sanity and realize how they were exploited as "cash cows" in the name of love, when the only thing you loved was the cash, you feel!) So, when you're in this game you reap what you sow: you sowed the seeds of exploitation and you got exploited by your best friend — and then you're looking for sympathy from Beat readers? Blame the game and blame yourself for the game you're playing. Find a legal hustle, 'cause this whole thing of selling someone else's flesh instead of rocks or sacks or whatever, is some straight bull. And you're happy you've still got your stash hidden away. Well, that's a ticking time bomb which will give you some fast money up front and have you locked up or shot down in that thug life you need to take a good, hard look at, instead of acting like you're hard while you're stealing candy from a baby. Listen, we know it's especially difficult to see through the game when the family that raised you is in it, too; and that it feels good to pay your mama's bills — but you need to be a man and get some do-right so you can stay free day and night to help pay the bills for the heat and the lights with a legal paycheck that's guaranteed correct. We intend no disrespect, but consider this a doctor's visit: You need a check up from the neck up, and we're just trying to help you get with it.

What Is Your Problem?

What is your problem? Are you stupid?

What is your problem? You never met your Cupid?

What is your problem? Did you fail?

What is your problem? Afraid you goin' to hell?

What is your problem? Why didn't you go to school?

What is your problem? Are you a fool?

What is your problem? You never learned to skate?

What is your problem? Why do you always hate?

What is your problem? Do you see something funny?

What is your problem? You need money?

-The Militant Kid

From The Beat: Great questions! Keep the list flowing! Since we know you're not stupid, what's your problem?

Why We Do It

We all do crime because sometime we think it's fun, or maybe we be too high and be off too many pills and that shhh make you do whatever you want to do. You don't be tripping and you don't care about whatever, so you keep popping and do whatever.

-Thizz Kid

From The Beat: The problem with taking chemicals (pills) so you can "do whatever you want," is that some of the things you want will always put you behind four walls and into the hands of strangers. It's time to start exercising some control over your own life. If it's drugs that lead you here, then you should try to find a path away from drugs. There are programs that can help (NA, AA), but every program depends on one basic principle: you have to want to change! Do you?

I All About Freedom

I would shoot someone for my freedom 'cause

My freedom is my life or I'd trade my B for my freedom

-Matthew

From The Beat: If your freedom is your life, why do you do things that put you on the radar of the 5-0 and land you here doing a Beat workshop? You can't trade someone else's life for your freedom. You can only live your life in a way that keeps it moving forward in safety and in freedom.

What Drew Me To Crime?

I grew up around selling drugs and fast money. My dad sells drugs, my cousin sells drugs, my older brother used to sell drugs, now my brother sells drugs, now I sell drugs. As fast the money come, as fast the money goes, for any fast way you get money, you will see or just think when was the last time you had some real money. I am not talking about a few hundred. I am talking about some racks.

But it's better to save and forget. I have more than a few racks but drugs is not going like how it used to. You're better off doing what I do now is pimping, but it ain't easy. It's really hard when you first start but you get used to it.

-Baby Guail

From The Beat: Do you feel proud of yourself that you make money off the backs of others who are weaker than you? Sounds like coward's play to us. As you point out, as fast as the money comes in the quick and dirty way, that's how fast it goes out. Seems to us that you might consider something a little more reliable without the risks of putting your life in the hands of strangers. Of course, to do that requires some inner strength and courage that maybe you don't feel you have. Why do you need "racks of money?" What if you went to school and got a job after school? What if you finish school and get your diploma? What if? Would you starve? Would you have to sleep on the streets? That may sound square to you, but what does being locked up sound like to you?

Boring Camp

Camp is hella boring, but it's all good 'cause I should be getting released soon. Yesterday I just got my release plan.

-Jeff

From The Beat: Props on finishing your program. Are you going back to the same old same? Has anything changed?

What Brightens My Spirit

What brightens my life is me being free
 What brightens my day is being me
 What brightens my spirit is kicking back
 What brightens my spirit is drivin' da 'Lac
 What brightens my spirit is being da boss
 What brightens my spirit is when I floss
 What brightens my spirit is when I go dumb
 What brightens my spirit is where I'm from
 What brightens my spirit is buying gum
 What brightens my spirit is going to school
 What brightens my spirit is staying cool
 What brightens my spirit is seeing my boo
 What brightens my spirit is what I do
 What brightens my spirit is my life
 What brightens my spirit is seeing my wife
 What brightens my spirit really for real is GOD!

-Kheim

From The Beat: It seems like your spirit has a whole lot of reasons to be bright. Is it easy to make you happy? Are you in a good mood or bad mood most of the time? It brightens our spirits to know that even in a situation such as yours, things still have the power to brighten your spirit.

Getting Out

What 's'up, Beat? I'm so happy that I'm getting out of here. I been in this place for a month and I been waiting to get out of here, because being in here is not cool. I just can't wait until they come and get me. I miss my family so much and I am going to stay in school and just get my stuff together.

-Fred

From The Beat: Everybody can't wait to get out of there — we know that much. However, getting out isn't the hard part. It's staying out that makes you a champion amongst champions. So how do you plan on doing that? Going to school and taking it seriously is an excellent start. Good luck.

Guess Who's Back

This Lil' Walt. I'm back fo' my 6th time. I'm hella mad because I be trying to stay out and it just don't be going my way. Well I missed '05. I was sent to a group home for nine months. That was hella whack, but I pimped that. I was out the group home for 18 days and caught a dope case. That's weak. Now, I'm waiting for my release on Monday.

-Lil' Walt

From The Beat: We hate to see young people going through the revolving doors of juvenile hall. We wonder if you didn't set yourself up for failure by "pimping" your group home instead of trying to truly prepare yourself for freedom — meaning, prepare yourself for remaining free. When you get released, whether it's Monday or not, how will you break the incarceration cycle so you can spend a significant amount of time out here with us?

The Hall Ain't Cool

The hall is not cool. I don't like being in here because one of the reasons is you have to wear the next guy's underwear. Other people have to tell you where to go to the restroom and tell you when to get up in the morning and wash up for school. Eating this food is not cool, so do right to your mama, and keep ya' head up.

-Young D

From The Beat: What we find so interesting is that even after finding out how whack the hall is, so many young men and women make that return trip... Now that you know how messed up the hall is, will that be enough to keep you out for good? Have you experienced enough of juvie to never want to come back? What changes do you plan to make in your life to avoid that revolving door?

Starting Over

If I could start all over, I would go to school, stay in school till I get in college. Get a good job, probably be a basketball player. Never smoke, never drink alcohol. I would have the purest body ever.

And after all that is said and done, I would be a hustla, you better ask about me.

-DeAndre

From The Beat: We're not sure how to read this, DeAndre. There's absolutely no reason we can think of why you can't start fresh and achieve what you say you want — school, college, basketball. You can quit smoking and drinking and purify your body. But how does all those fine-sounding words lead to the conclusion that you would be a hustla? Seems like you haven't decided what you want in life, 'cause you can't do both. Time to choose.

Stay In School

If I could start all over I'll stay in school and not do so much I did so I wouldn't have to look over my shoulder 24/7. And wouldn't have to worry about a brother taking my life for me taking the next. I'll step my money game up so I could get my momma out the ghetto and that's what's real.

-St. Lewy

From The Beat: At least now you know what you want. How do you think you could go about getting it? You're no good to your momma locked up, so how will you get your money to get her out the ghetto without putting your freedom at risk again? (We know she'd like a new and better place to live; but we also know that the best gift you could give her is yourself.)

True Words

Q-vo? This is Joker from Newark. First and foremost, I would like to start this wila (note) by sending my love and embracements to all those that have never given up on me. I am grateful for having the support of my familia through these hard times.

My jefta (mom) once told me that "smiling faces tell lies and gangstas get lonely," but I never took the time to think about that till now that I'm locked up. Late night when I'm sittin' in my cell listening to oldies, I think about all those foo's that pretended to be coo', but as soon as I got locked up and they knew I wasn't getting out no time soon, them vatos were the first to stab me in the espalda (back).

Here I am doing time for the varrio ('hood), and my own so-called homeboys are the ones testifying against me in court! I gotta let them foo's know what's up through this Beat. I don't want to talk about my case, but my "big" charge got dropped and now I'm an eighteen year old with two bullets (strikes) facing a maximum of only seven years, primos. My earliest possible parole date is in 2010, but you know, for sure, I'm getting out of this torcida (jail).

I just know I couldn't have done this tiempo (time) without my familia. I'm'a end this wila right here by sending my mejores deseos (best desires) to all the raza.

-Joker

From The Beat: You say you're "doing time for the varrio" and your "so-called homeboys" don't seem to respect it. There is a lesson to be learned here, but it's not about whichever particular homeboys you're talking about. No, it's about the very notion of "doing time for the varrio". As you see, you do time by yourself, for whatever you did, and the varrio is no better off for whatever you did in its name. It was a fantasy, thinking that you did what you did "for the varrio". The homeboys have not only melted away but shown up to testify against you. Your family is still there for you. If you aren't clear on the concept that you need to do for your family, not your so-called varrio, then you're still lost, and whenever you get out, you won't have learned a thing. Also, what you do for your family — what you do, period — is crucially important. If you want to support your family, you do it with money from a legal job and by setting an example of how to stay out of trouble. If you commit a violent act (crime), you're not doing it for anyone, just against someone who may or may not deserve it. Your family deserves to have you there for them, not in and out of lock up. You feel? Forget the "varrio". Keep it real.

Victims

Yes I have been a victim. I been a victim of a robbery. It was about 1:00 a.m. in the morning. I was walking through Royal Park and this dude came up to me and pulled out a gun, and told me to empty out my pockets. I told him, "You got me messed up."

After a while I told him all right and gave him everything in my pockets. The very next night the same guy came up to me and ask me did I have any rocks. I told him come back in ten minutes. So I went home and came back with a bat.

You know what happen next. He became the victim.

-Baby Boi

From The Beat: Have you ever jacked someone? Did the feeling of being a victim make you think about your own victims and what they might have been feeling? When you took your violent revenge, did it make you feel like you weren't a victim any more, or just that you were getting even? Is there any way off this circle of crime and retaliation? Where does it lead?

Everything

If I could start over, I would start over with everything, which means I would not come to jail or hurt my family in any way. I would start over in school and get my grades up and get my GED on the outs.

I can't start over. I'm forced to face the things that come my way which means group homes and CYA, and all types of shhh.

I would never join a gang because all the stuff it got me into, like this BS. I would try to be with my family more often. Then I would never be in here in the first place. So I would also change my lil' brothers life, and help him not be in this type of life style. So I would change a lot in my life, also my lil' brothers.

-Lil' Man

From The Beat: Is it just us or does it sound like the things you said you wish you could start over and do are still possible? Even if you're facing time in the Y or a group home, there is life after incarceration. What's to prevent you from making the changes you say you want to make? You still have great influence over your little brother, so keep your role as role model in mind, recognizing that what you do is far more important than what you say, especially to a child like your brother. Do you feel like your time in juvie is preparing you for a fresh start? If so, how will you use it? If not, how are you preparing yourself?

That Little Girl

This person I am seeing looks so familiar, but I can't seem to remember where I know you from. It was a long time ago but I just can't put my finger on it.

Oh wait, now I remember you, you were that little girl who loved life so much, who had dreams as wide as the sky, who would climb the top of the world if she put her mind to it — the girl who jumped and played with her friends.

But as I look at this little girl that I remember and once knew, she don't look like that little girl at all. She's going the wrong way doing what she wants to do, getting into trouble getting into fights. What I would do to help this little girl do right? What else do I see when I look at this little girl for all I am seeing is my reflection of me.

-Lil' Shorty

From The Beat: This is both deep and sad. When and how did the little girl change from who she was to who she became? The fact that you can see her so clearly means that the little girl is still living inside you, still wanting to express her little girl exuberance and hope. None of us can completely reclaim our innocence, but what can you do to bring more of the little girl out into the open so that when you look in the mirror, along with the adult you are becoming, you'll see that innocent little girl again.

The Person I Thought I Loved

I really thought I did love this person.
It's like I'm crazy about this person.
I think about this person 24 seven.
If only that person knew.
This person I think I'm playing with them.
But I'm really not, I really do love you.
You're like my shooting star, falling down on me.
This person has their crazy days, but I still love this person.
Even tho' Mrs. Wadud caught up with me.
But it's okay because I still love this person.
Night and day I pray for this person not to leave.
Even though we all get a release.
But it's okay 'cause I'm gone let this person get their peace.
At first this person said they loved me too.
But now it's like forget you two.
But I don't care because I still love you too
And I know you do too.

-Ja' Laya

From The Beat: It sounds like love has you a little confused — which love has a habit of doing. The title of your beautiful poem is 'The Person I Thought I Loved', yet you end by saying you still love this person. How did this person get such a hold on you? What characteristics does this person have that just knock you off your feet? Is this a first love?

If You Could Start Over

If I could start over I would still be fresh, still be pimping. But what I won't do is be out there selling drugs, robbing people, or shooting people. I would be doing everything right, listening to my mom, making her proud, still having grill shining, and jewelry. I would try to be a positive influence on my cousins and family.

-Lil' Moosa

From The Beat: Do you think you have to start life over to do the things you regret not doing? If you commit yourself to the changes you describe here, then you will be starting over, no "ifs" about it. Will there be things holding you back?

Only God Can Judge Me

What brightens my spirit is thinking sometimes no matter what anybody can say about what you do or your crimes or sins you make, only god can judge me. And that's all that matters.

-St. Lewy

From The Beat: God's judgment matters the most, but unfortunately, the judgment of human beings is what has put you behind these walls. So we hope you don't wait till the next life to make some changes that will change the system's judgment of you. What judgments do people make of you that aren't true? If God were to judge you today, what do you look like in God's eyes?

Just Rich

If I could change, I'll be the same but rich. I will also make the right choice like going to school and getting on the hoop team and also taking advantage over the good things in life. Also make my mother happy for me and also my father, which been dead for seventeen years.

-Lil' Dannut

From The Beat: What's stopping you from changing right now and going after your dream, that starts with school and includes basketball? Are you any good at playing ball? We know you're not alone when you say you want to be rich. What would you do with all that money if you were sittin' on

Money, Peer Pressure and Greed

Yes, it was because of money. That's what brought me to the Hall and now here at Camp. So I don't blame nobody but myself.

It's peer pressure and a lot of greediness, and when you get too greedy — then you start not to think. So, my friends bring me to the crime, but it's my decision to do the crime. But I've changed my ways and I'm turning my life around!

-Alan

From The Beat: Greed can be like an addiction, to where you've got to have it so bad that you can't think about anything but getting as soon as possible by any means necessary. And just like a dope fiend, you get bolder, also known as dumber, by which you mean you take stupid chances until you get caught up if you're lucky and shot if you're not. We're glad you've changed, 'cause it was your life going down the drain. Now, maintain!

Happy Birthday

Happy birthday my friend
From thick and thin
I know we in the hall
But you still can outshine all
Be strong and never fall
Please don't cry
'Cause it hurt me inside
I know it's your birthday
So live it with pride
I know I'm your friend from school
and all
But deep down inside
You're a shining star
Happy birthday.

-Lil' Shanks

From The Beat: What a great tribute to someone celebrating a birthday. Have you ever celebrated a birthday while in the hall? It must be hard to experience that. How old will your friend be? This poem is a great birthday present!

My Lil' Mama

What it do? It's yo' boy Dre keeping it solid behind these walls of the hall. On some real stuff, I'm missin' my friends but mostly my lil' mama. If you reading this, I want you to know you always on my mind boo.

-Dre

From The Beat: Was she always on your mind when you were on the streets? Was she on your mind when you did whatever it was that let the system take you away from her? How long do you expect her to wait for you?

A Victim

I was a victim of alcohol and drugs. They only made the pain I was trying to get rid of worsen. I like the cause of weed and pills, but I do not like the effect. I need to stop abusing these substances so I can stop coming to the hall because I get tested every two weeks.

How can something so bad feel so good? I know inside that it's all a lie. I need to change my habits. I stopped for about six months but I just recently started back again. I am going to quit so I can succeed my program.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: We've learned that they can give you as many programs as they have to offer, but if you aren't really ready to stop, you won't. Of course, if you're tested every two weeks, we're pretty sure you'll stop for as long as you're being tested. And since you can make yourself stop in those circumstances, it's pretty clear that stopping is within your control — but only if you want to exercise that control. Besides those "good feelings," what have alcohol and drugs brought you? What are your strongest temptations when you get out? Hopefully you'll learn how to deal with them in a way that doesn't cause you to be powerless. This is one of those areas where there actually is help out there. But like we said, first you must want it.

Out Of Fear

I was a victim once. When I was at my house, three b-boys ran up in my house with a AR-15 and two .45's. I was in my room and I heard something. I go see who it was, and in my back yard I saw three people. They see me. Then they drop me to the ground and ran through my pockets, and took my wallet with no money.

Then they ran off. After that I was afraid to go outside. Every time I see a person come around the corner I get scared. After what happen, I stay packing. Now I stay in Oakland with violence.

-Ruben

From The Beat: You were clearly traumatized by that event that could have ended in tragedy. Do you think that staying packed makes your life any safer? If you had been packing that day, do you think it would have helped or hurt the situation? Can you imagine how that gun might have been used either by you or against you, and changed the entire course of your life and the lives of others? Is there any way to stay clear of the violence?

Got Robbed

I got robbed of my freedom on 3-21-06. Cops handcuffed me in jail with a charge of burglary and assault with a deadly weapon (machete). They had no evidence except a witness. I could prove I wasn't there on the day of the robbery.

-Tran

From The Beat: Have you spoken to a lawyer yet? When the government has a witness to a crime, it's hard to beat (even though so-called eye witnesses often get it wrong). But if you can really prove you weren't there on that day, that's the kind of alibi a lawyer can work with to get you off.

Hey What's Up Beat Within

Hey, what's up, Beat Within? Me, not too good 'cause I'm in here doing my time in B unit waiting to go home. The judge trying to send me to camp, but camp told the judge that my case ain't the thing for camp. So the judge told me to come back in two weeks to see what he going to do to me.

Well, I went to court on the 13th of March, and he was talking about sending me home or to a group home. But my probation officer told the judge to let me go home on home supervision. But the judge said he was going to think about it, and just come back on the 29th of March. I been here for a month and two weeks.

I was almost off probation and came back here for some stupid stuff, but I hope I go home on my next court date. This all I got for The Beat till next time. To all y'all that's in the hall stay strong and keep y'all head up.

-Lil' Trail

From The Beat: It must be frustrating to get your court date postponed against your own will. How are you keeping your head up and staying strong? If they don't let you go home, what placement do you think will do you the most good? When you say you were almost off probation but came back for "some stupid stuff," do you mean you were stupid to do it, or the system is stupid for making it a violation? Either way, it's your responsibility to know what you can't do, and to avoid doing it, feel us? We hope everything works out the way you're hoping, but if not, we know you're strong enough to handle what they give you.

My Life

Life is not promised to anybody in the world. I have been robbed with a knife and a gun. I've been shot and shot at enough times. I think robbery is dumb now.

I would not change anything about my life. I would keep my same family and friends. My life is my life and I won't change.

-T.P.

From The Beat: We can respect your opinion, but when you say you won't change, does that mean you plan to continue doing the things that led away from your family and into the hall? If so, can you expect any different outcome than the one you're facing right now? Is it possible that as you grow and experience new things, change will happen anyway?

On The Run

What up Beat? What happen with ya' fools. As for me just chilling in here waiting on court to come up and doing the time not letting time do me, feel me.

I might be going to CYA but I'm praying on ROP. But hey, who's to say. I know if I go to a group home I'm kicking fo' sho', but that's just me. The last placement I was in was Camp Sweeney and I did not wanna be there so I kicked. So to me I think ROP or CYA might be better for me because it's a lockdown facility. I won't be able to run. So 'till paper meets pen I'm out.

-Lil' Atam

From The Beat: Do you think the only thing that will help you is a lock down facility? That makes us think that you have locked yourself down, put yourself in a mental box that you need to find the key for. Why are you determined to run if you go to a group home when you haven't even experienced day one. What if you actually like it? Or more to the point, what if you would have liked it if you'd only given yourself a chance? Even ROP and CYA can't keep you locked down forever. Then what will you do?

Being My Own Friend

Every time I find a friend they either turn they back on me or decide it's time for a change. Being in the hall has forced me not to get too close to someone because I'm doing serious time, so if I get close to someone it's hard for me to watch them go!

I've learned to be my own friend which I am sure will help me later in life. Once everybody has turned their back and left me, I will always have myself! As far as trust... y'all know what's up.

-Juicy

From The Beat: We agree with you only partly, Juicy. Yes, it is good that you develop some independence from others, especially if you're going to be here for a long minute. But at the same time, it's also good to have people in your life that you can have fun with, be serious with, exchange confidences with. There are people in this world who are true to their word, and therefore are trustworthy. They may be hard to find, but they exist. We hope you find someone to hook up with in a positive way, even if you're both locked up.

Shot

I was standing on the block.
Talking to these knocks.
Then these dudes drive by.
They pulled out guns and started bustin'.
I ran but I bust back.

Everybody got shot at.
I got shot five times.
One in the butt, one in the left arm, and three in my leg.

Now I'm sitting in the hall
Looking at four walls
Waiting for my release
On Thurs...

I believe I will get out of here
So I can move forward
Go to college, to be a basketball coach
I want to have a family
Live in New York, marry a New York guy
Not one of these California guys

This is Baby D's story of what she want to do after she got shot

-Dominique

From The Beat: Did getting shot make you want to take your life more seriously? Or do you feel like since you got shot and are still living, not much else can stop you? We're sure that was a scary experience, a much-too-close brush with death. How will you avoid getting shot at — and shooting back at — in the future? Are you finished with high school? That's the first and necessary step before college.

Girls And Boys

Girls are pretty
And boys are greedy
Man, every time I see a beautiful girl I start bleeding
And then them girls start cheesing.

-Joseph

From The Beat: We can tell that you were just trying to rhyme words because why would you bleed when you saw a girl? (You could have said, "every time I see a beautiful girl, I get needy...") And furthermore, why would she you see bleeding and start cheesing?

My First Love

My first love was this girl that I had met on da Bay Area Party Line. At first it was cool, but then she gave me her real number. We talk every day from morning to night and to the next morning.

We have been together for two years and I haven't talk to her for two months. So I still wonder if we still together because I haven't called her. But girl, I still love you and that on my mama.

-Young B

From The Beat: Will you search for your lost love when you get out? Could you accept it if she found someone else in your absence?

Missing

I'm missing the streets I'm missing my 'hood
I'm missing those times I was up to no good

I want to go home, just set me free
Give me some chances and let me be
I miss my family I want to go home
I'm tired of spending these nights all alone
I no longer want to be incarcerated

In my cell isolated
This shhh ain't fun
I want to go outside and "play" in the sun
Let me go home, I'll try to do right
I'll try to keep my two best friends
Nina and Mary Jane out of my sight
Let me go home, set me free

What are you getting out of keeping me?
Does it make you feel safe? You think you a'ight?
What about the 343,000,000 other criminals
creeping and crawling at night?
Like I said set me free!

-Bianca

From The Beat: Of course you're missing your freedom, Bianca. That's exactly what jails are designed to make you feel. The question is whether you can remember this feeling when you're back on the outs and able to make your own decisions. Most everyone makes promises to change when they're locked up, but only a few stay true to those promises when they have freedom to choose. We hope you are one of those few, because you have a lot to give. It doesn't matter how many "other" criminals are out there doing their thing if you are caught for your own crimes. You can't control them, only yourself. And as for your friends, Nina and Mary Jane, they were never your friends to begin with!

What Brightens Your Spirit

My mom brightens my spirit, 'cause she has always been there for me and she has changed my life from a thug to a young man.

-Lil' Moosa

From The Beat: What a tremendous gift your mom has given you! In what ways do you plan on brightening her spirit in return?

RIP Lil Arturo

By what I wrote at the top I'm sure you know what that means. Yet another fallen soldier. He will be missed dearly. He may be dead but he is still alive in my mind and heart.

I'ma be real with y'all. I don't believe he's passed away. No matter how hard I try something deep down inside tells me that he's still alive. He's somewhere out there. But I ask myself is this denial? I'm yet not sure what it is.

I was very close to him. He looked out for a homegirl. I would always go to his house with some homeboys and head straight to the kitchen. His broke ass only had a couple of slices of bread and ham so that's all I would ever eat when I went to his house. At times all he had was water and beer.

It's going to be very hard for me to let him go. He passed away supposedly on March 11, 2006. I will forever remember him. If he is "dead," I'm sure he's in a better place now. Only God knows why stuff happens but then that's the life style of a G! RIP Arturo. We love you; you will be missed! Dead to forever be remembered. Rest In Paradise; Gangsta Paradise. See you soon.

-Bianca

From The Beat: This is a very heartfelt tribute to a fallen friend, Bianca. You say that only God knows why stuff happens, but that's not altogether true since you quickly add that "that's the life style of a G!" So you also know why stuff happens. We wonder if you think it was worth your friend's life to have lived the style he chose to live. And we also wonder whether his death will affect anything about the way you choose to live your life. We are sure you will always keep the memory of Arturo alive, and that is a way to honor him. But if you live your life in a way puts it at risk, that memory may be short lived...

What It Do?

What it do Beat? Man, I think it's tha last time I'ma write to y'all because I'm out to a group home is San Bernadino. Got to do 9-12 months. I'ma try to do my shhhh so I can get off probation and be back with my family and shhhh.

But hey, I wish luck to every soul that's behind all these doors, and pray to get give another chance in life to be in the real world and shhhh. You just got to believe in what you want.

-Lil' B'dazzle

From The Beat: All we can say is we hope you take your own advice on your journey through life because your advice is very wise. But there's no reason why this should be the last time you write for us. You can always write to us from a group home, from the slammer or from your own bedroom. Tell us what the group home is like. What's hard about it? What's easy? We'll put your piece in the back of the magazine, The Beat Without. Good luck in San Berdu...

Missing My 'Hood

I'm here Young B. Been locked up for two months thinking about what is poppin' in da 'hood. I aint got no letter from nobody telling me what going on. I need to know what popping in my 'hood.

-Young B

From The Beat: Doesn't the fact that you haven't received a letter from anyone on your spot tell you something about your so-called homies? If all you can think about is what's poppin' in the 'hood, you're letting the time use you — and setting yourself up for a return trip.

Diddy's Problem: Love of Money

My problem is I'm in love with money. I always talk about it. It's something I gotta have, sometimes even if it cost my freedom.

It's not my fault. I like the finer things in life. It's just how I grew up, wantin' the best shoes, cleanest bikes, latest games. Now I want expensive clothes, cars on rims, and lots of snow bunnies! I'm tryin' to see new places and enjoy life. I know I can get it, so why not try? Don't hate!

-Diddy

From The Beat: You're hating on yourself, 'cause manner in which you pursue wealth has put you right here in pants with no belt. Look at yourself. Your pockets aren't empty because you don't even have pockets now. You call this the best? Change your ways and get blessed! Otherwise the new places you see, will be CYA, jails and penitentiaries. Diddy, please!

Hard To Stay Positive

At first I was positive I wasn't going to YA, but now it's getting more difficult for me to believe my own lie. I got two more charges added on and if I fight one more time, I'll get extra charges added. And if it's gang related, I'm screwed!

My life is in God's hands. He will make the decision. I'm going to tell y'all this, if it ain't YA, it's Chowchilla (adult system).

-Juicy

From The Beat: Bottom line you have to make better decisions on how you want to run your life. You have a choice, it is not all in God's hands! Rise up! Control yourself! Keep your hands to yourself. Can you do that? Why are you letting the little things bother you? Do words really hurt? Stay to yourself! Write! Read! Look at the problems you are facing, CYA or prison, this is no joke! Sitting in prison be it one year or life is all bad. Wake up!

Get Ya Money

It ain't 'bout bein' hard.
It's bout getting yo' money
Suckas bust guns
When they see me they run
Ninjas get locked up
For them petty ass cases
They ain't doin' nothing in the streets
But snitchin' and takin' a loss
Don't hate on me, I'm a boss
Better watch out
'Cause we don't play
We lettin' ninjas know
For the suckas think they hard
Get ya money
Don't be a dummy
Later Beat I'ma be around

-Lil' Suave

From The Beat: You'll be around, but where? Around on the streets? Around in the Hall? We want to see you get your money for REAL – which means get money the system can't take away from you, get money you don't need to risk your life for, get money that doesn't come from hurting other people by stealing or dealing. What do you think? How would you make that big money, if you wanted to do it legit? And like you say "don't be a dummy."

Part Time Crook

What's up wit' it Beat? It's yo' boy lil' Juanito from them Hayward streets. Y'all asked what's something we've lost? And what we'll give up for it?

Well I've lost a lot of things but I'll write on my freedom. Damn police took my freedom nine months ago and threw me in this hole, and left without second guessing if I was innocent or not. Well what I'm willing to give for my freedom ain't changing' my lifestyle, nah forget that I'm in love wit' the hood, but I'll give up runnin' the streets late night Monday through Thursday. Not on weekends, though. That's when you catch people slippin'. Yup that's what I'll give up for my freedom.
One love to all doin' time.

Don't wanna go to that pen
I'm hittin' fences, marks on a ninjas' back
Missin' me by inches
Tell momma don't cry
Cause even if they kill me they can never take the life of a real 'G
-I'm Gettin' Money. Tupac

-Lil' Troublesum

From The Beat: Um, we're not too sure how a person can be a part-time hoodlum. So we're just going to take this Monday through Thursday "Crime on a Schedule" as a joke, because you always know how to see the light in even the darkest things. We wonder, when we read these, what do you picture your life like – not in 10 years, but in 20. Who will you be? Where will you be? What kind of man will you be? You quote 'Pac: "Tell Momma don't cry" ... will your momma have cried? How much?

Roses And Violets

Roses are red, violets are blue
I'm in love but not with you
When we broke up you thought I cried
But all it was, was another guy
You told yo' friends that I was a trick
I told mines that you had a weak...
I said I loved you and you thought it was true
So guess what baby, you got played too!

-Dominique

From The Beat: It never feels good to be lied to or betrayed. You may be too young to really understand this, but returning the wrong that a person has done to you diminishes you. Why would you remain with someone who you didn't think was faithful? Why not break up with that person and date the other person? Why do you think that people say, "I love you" and don't mean it?

I Got Lots Of Problems

Saludos wit' honor and embracements to all those across this wall. All you solid vatos you know who you are. Well down to this topic: What is my problem?

Nelly, my problem is staff, though some are coo' I got respect for but the others.... Second, this small cold ass cell. I barely got enough room to bust down. When my carnal was here, he used to be in the cell across from me, and we use to bust down all day.

Oh ya, another thing is this damn dog food. My plate last night smelt like straight horse shhh. Serio pedo. (Lastly, is when these foo's repeat the self over and over wit' the same ass line. "Ain't no secret," "ain't nothing 'happenin'")

Ya feel me. I know you heard them played out lines. I also ain't feelin' this segregation shhh they got me and the homeboy on. Me and my carnal on this side still on this program.

That's my damn problem

-Shorty

From The Beat: Well, like we said, you can always use your writing to get frustrations off your chest. Sorry county life is bringing you down, but get use to it if you're down for this gangster prison lifestyle. And these are all the surface problems, right? You've battled and beaten much deeper problems in your life, and you still have some you're fighting. Remember, as long as you are living this life, you will be suffering from a number of problems. We receive letters daily from men and women across the country, who carry the burden of so many problems, but in the end the only one they can blame is themselves for the choices they have made with their life.

A Victim Of The System

I'm a victim of that in which you could not see.
I'm a victim and the one who victimizes me,
Is the same one that you can't see,
He the same one that gets everyone else that slips on the
Ice of life but doesn't quite fall.
I'm a victim of the system
And I refuse to lose to the stuff it put me through.
I will not fail, my will will not allow me to
As I follow the clues.
I chose to lose as I break
Society's rules.
As these fools continue to lose
I put forth a giant bruise
In the system as it tries to hold
Slim down.
I lays it on the this weak-ass set up,
As I will never get caught again.

-Slim Up

From The Beat: You say you're a victim of the system. We're curious to know what 'the system' is to you. When you hear someone say the word system, what do you think about? The one thing missing from your analysis is your own contribution to becoming a victim of the system. And the fact that you conclude you will never get caught again is part of you setting yourself up for the same fall all over again. Only fools or children think they can keep doing the same as before without facing the same consequences as before. Are you one of those? Have you been a victim besides being incarcerated?

If I Could Start Over

I would have never did what I did that day I wish I would have thought twice. Because at the time I was thinking that it would not be no consequences or repercussions.

-Winston

From The Beat: It's good that you are thinking about things that you would do differently. There is a law in physics that says that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. That means that there are consequences to every decision that you make. The hard part is figuring out if you can deal with the consequences.

Big Things

I don't commit crimes. I got caught in a racist act by the OPD. They didn't like that I was out there doing my thang and that I was going to do big things. But that's OK, I'm a mack and the government can't hold me down. I'm going to get where I want anyway.

-T-Mooky

From The Beat: Man, you end with a sentence like that and don't tell us the rest? What did the OPD do that was racist? Where is it that you want to get to? What were you doing to earn your money that wasn't a crime? This piece leaves a lot of mysteries, we hope you write more for us soon especially how you are going to get over the government. Fat chance.

When Love Hurts

To me I see a lot of people going through tough love. But when I see people hurt I get mad and I start feeling for them. But me, I don't think it's right to hurt girls any kind of way. I love girls too much to hurt them.

-Young B

From The Beat: That's very nice of you. If there were more guys out there like you, the world would be a better place. The Beat wants to ask you to take just one (or maybe two) topics and write in more detail about it. When you write about three or four topics, you don't leave yourself much time to say too much, and you cheat us out of the details of your thinking.

People Say

People say I'm bad but I'm not. So they cannot judge me until they know me 'cause as a matter of fact I am a very nice person and I am a good person. It's just sometimes I go though a lot and I don't like people judging me.

-Dominique

From The Beat: No one likes to be judged. No matter how great a person's life seems, we all struggle with something and have something about us that needs some work. We suggest that you hold onto the famous words of Tupac Shakur, "Only God can judge me."

What True Love

To me true love is you and a person have feeling for each other no matter what is going on. I thought me and this girl name Shy have love but guess not.

-Young B

From The Beat: Yeah, that's usually how it goes. You think someone loves you, but in the end you find out you were trippin'.

Thank You Beat

Thanks for everything beat. I want to say it was fun being in The Beat Within. I will write more from the Y. One Love

-Lil Tai Viet

From The Beat: Stay up, we can't wait to hear from you.

Time-Out For Me

What's up Beat, this ya' boy Ron, still in the Hall. I ain't stressin' about it but this ain't the life that I would like to be living. I miss my family, baby mama and my squad. This is crazy how the system is run, because one person who went to school (but made a mistake, or poor choice, or wrong place at the wrong time) could be incarcerated for the rest of your entire living. This is a time-out for me because it gives me a chance to think about how I'm going to do things different or better. I don't plan on coming back here because this is a place where they don't treat you right.

They treat you like a piece of shut yo' mouth.

But I think that this is the best place for me to be at, 'cause there's a lot of people getting killed and I think that I would be one of them person dead 'cause I was doing some dirt to people.

-Ron

From The Beat: You sound like a wise person, now. Yes, now, or at least in this piece you write us. It seems like as bad as lockdown is, you were in serious danger on the outs. What kinds of plans are you making during this "time out"? What will you do when you get released? All those dangers, risks and temptations will be there. So do you have a plan for how to avoid having to come back here, or worse? Are there places to avoid, people to avoid? What's your strategy?

He Stole My Car

Hey, my name is Pedro. I'm 15 years old. I once was a victim all because of drugs. I was in a car with a homey of mine. We were smoking and someone came to the window and told me to get out of my car. He was pointing a gun at me, so I got out and he got in and took the car.

-Pedro

From The Beat: Did the guy who took your car get caught? What do you mean it was all because of drugs? Was he on drugs? Were you on drugs? Did you learn anything from this experience?

The Worst Day Of My Life

The worst day of my life was on Saturday night. Me and my cousins were on our way to a party. We was on the bus and my cousin Marcel was talking about his K-Swiss. The guy he was talking about was getting mad, so he walked to the front of the bus to get away from us. So when our stop came we got off and the guy gone tell my cousin Marcel that he a dog!

Marcel got back on the bus and fired on him. Then the other dude that was wit' him pulled out a knife out his pocket and started walking toward my cousin. So I got on the bus and knocked his ass out and he dropped the knife. So while I'm beating his ass, Marcel got off the bus and the dude he was fighting grabbed the knife and stabbed me in the head four times. I got off the bus and got my 9mm from my potna and was about to get on the bus and kill him, but then I saw the Ambulance People and I tried to run from them but I passed out and they took me to the hospital and gave me staples in my head.

But that not even the worst part. On my way home from the hospital that night at like 12:30 a.m. I wanted to go to Lacey so my brother dropped me and Marcel off at the corner. We got to the bottom of the Hill or Lacey and a scraper rode by and started shooting at us. I got shot in the back and in my leg and Marcel got shot in the foot. So for the second time in one night I was on my way back to the hospital.

-Lil C-M

From The Beat: We don't think you've described the worst part. The worst part is that you don't seem to have learned anything from nearly killing someone and nearly being killed — all over some stupid words! Because someone called your cousin a name, you both acted in ways that could have meant the end of both of your lives, either by being killed or going to the Y until you're 25. If guns and knives are the way you think problems get solved, you have a much bigger problem ahead of you. This is a very frightening story, but it's not as frightening as what awaits you down the line if you don't change your thinking. And soon!

To All

To all, this be Lil Travieso from Fremont. I'm here locked up with the homies just kicking it and trying to do our programs. But anyways I also want to say to all to keep true and your heads up because every situation you in you'll be out with the help of God, just believe in Him. But anyways to all the homies and homegirls what's up!?

Well I just want to say that I love you Yvette and also to all the fallen soldiers, Rest in Paradise, keep trucha. RIP Pelon, Lil Guerito, Magic, Cobra, Traviasa Flaco, and my lil' brother Silent.

-Lil' Travieso

From The Beat: You say "Stay True" but what are you staying true to? Your mother, your father, your future children? When you get out, will you know how to stay true to yourself, or will you be staying true to the lifestyle that got you locked up?

New Life

If I can start a new life, I start going being good, coming in the house on time. I'd stop going stupid and I'd stop playing with guns and stop fighting and stop hanging out on the co'ner. I start playing basketball again and I stop driving cars.

What needs to happen is I need to get out of Juvenile, then pimp this group home and then get off probation, and from there I will start my new life. What would mess me up is not getting off probation and stayin' on the run, do more crimes, getting caught and sent to CYA.

-Lil' Sneak the Peak

From The Beat: What will need to happen if you really want to start a new life is just change yo' way of thinking. When you say you have to "pimp this group home," does that mean you'll just be putting in time, instead of using time to advance your thinking and your skills? What you do right now will affect your future. All it takes one bad decision and you are back in the halls — or worse — for even longer.

If I Can Start Over

I could start over I would not be writing what I am about to tell you right now. I'd be slicker than I am right now, get that dough. That what baby Quain all about, get that dough, my money, run young long like string.

-Baby Quain

From The Beat: Well, if Baby Quain thinks he can be slick enough to escape the system's consequences, then Baby Quain really is still a baby. Only a child would think he could keep doing the same things without facing the same consequences. Unless Baby Quain grows up pretty soon, he's going to learn this lesson the very hard way.

A Victim Of Crime

One day when I was having fun with my friends and when night fell, we went to this party. We all was having a good time until some guy start shooting in the party. I don't know whose house it was or who the guy was that started shoot.

I was shocked because I didn't think something like that would happen in someone else house. Then the party was over. Everybody had to leave and me and my friends was on bikes at the time, so we didn't leave until everybody else left. At the time when it had happened we was drunk and high so I couldn't really focus. I had fell off my bike and I laid on the ground for a minute. My head was spinning and I was very dizzy. My potna Fat Boy helped me up and we went home very safe.

-T-Face

From The Beat: Well, even though your story ends happily, it could have been very different. Of course, you aren't responsible for someone else shooting into that house, but you are responsible for being drunk and high and, therefore, not really thinking clearly. If getting drunk is a regular part of your social life, then we think you have a problem that you should deal with directly. Alcohol can ruin the lives of the richest people and the poorest. It doesn't care. So you'd better care.

I'm Older Now

The reason why I committed my first crime is because I didn't have nothing when I was little.

Being that I am older I realized that you have to work to receive. If I could go back in time with the knowledge I know now, I bet I would have never come here. Being that I am seventeen and about to be eighteen, I now know what it is like to have something taken from me, so I feel the people I have hurt or stolen from.

But being around stupid people made me stupid. Being that I am in the Hall, now give it gives me time to think about all have done and with I could turn the hands of time.

-Demetre

From The Beat: Sounds like you took a hard path to manhood, but you're still writing like a man now, not a boy. You made some mistakes, we all make mistakes, but you made them as a Juvenile, and now that you will be an adult, it's really not too late to make things better for yourself. Do you spend a lot of time in regret, wishing you could turn back time, or do you also spend some time with hope, planning for a different kind of future?

If I Can Start Over

If I can start my life over, I will do the totally opposite of what I am now. I would be going to school every day, and I would not have thought about robbin' people. I would not have sold drugs or smoked weed or ride in stolen cars or dealing with guns and shhh.

I wish I would have stayed in Brentwood with my Auntie. If I would have stayed with my Aunt, I would have been a whole new person from who I am now. She would have saved me from committing crime and using drugs. She nearly saved my life. I would not have been placed on probation.

-John Da Aoke

From The Beat: Sounds like you're Auntie is a very special person. Check this out though, there is absolutely nothing to stop you from doing all the things you say you would do differently — except your own motivations and decisions. You can stop what you're doing if you don't like it. When you get out, you can enjoy your freedom with your loved ones, if you really want to. We all make mistakes, but only those who learn from them and don't keep repeating the mistakes of the past can move into the future.

Don't Play With It!

Was up? This Jay M From Hayward, I'm gonna tell ya something, if you ain't with it, don't play with it. That means if you want to get in the game stay with it. If not, don't play with it, 'cause it ain't no fame! These people think it's a joke, well is not! Take that advice ya feel. Be safe.

-Green Eyes

From The Beat: We're not sure where you stand in relation to your advice. Are you saying you're in the game to stay because you don't play, or are you saying you're not playing the game any more because it's no joke? Since we don't see a way to win the game, we don't see a reason for playing it.

Start With School

I would start my new life with going to school. I would be one of those nerds. Instead of doing drugs and fighting, I'd be going to movies, roller-skating, all that shhh. I'd get a lot of stuff to, because my mom would be proud and she would give me money and trust. I wouldn't buy drugs with it. If I get out this week, I'm gonna try to restart. If not, I'll be back in a year.

-E-Riot

From The Beat: You know, whether you go home now or later, you can make all these changes in your life, and you can benefit from the rewards — like respect and trust from your mom, and giving yourself the educational foundation you need to succeed in life. There's nothing stopping you from doing all this, except the decisions you make.

Why

I started popping pills when I heard that it keeps your sex-drive up. I didn't know the effects of how it will put holes in your brain. But I didn't listen and kept popping them. I love to pop a pill with a female and freaking all night. Mac Dre is a pill legend. He always out hella pills and rappin' about shhh you don't know about.

-Mac Dre Jr.

From The Beat: It might be relevant to add that Mac Dre is dead! It sounds to us that you are trading away your future (including your future sex life) for instant pleasure today. That's the way children think. When you mature, you'll realize that all of us have to sacrifice some things in the short run for better things in the long run. If you found out that those pills destroyed your sex life when you get older, would you still be taking them? And anyway, why would a boy of your age need pills for sex? Is there something the matter with you that you can't do it without chemical help?

If You Could Start Over

If I could start over I would start by doing what I have to do and don't hang out with the wrong people. Start by going to school and I would start by not cutting class. I would never went with them to steal that car. I could have had stayed at school and did my work. But the one thing I would do is start over by not coming here to Juvenile Hall. If I didn't have come here and they would let me out I would do anything to get out of here.

-Juan

From The Beat: It's easy to say you'd do anything to get out of here, but then forget all the promises you made to yourself when you actually are out of here and able to make decisions for yourself. Don't be one of those young people who promise they'll change their lives, they'll go to school, they'll stop hanging on the block — and then the first thing they do when they get out is go back to where they got in trouble to begin with, smoke a blunt, get drunk, and start the whole process all over again.

Getting Away With It

I was a victim when my friend's was trying to steal a car. He was in a lot full of cars and when the man ran out to try to get us, we all ran behind someone house. When they left, we ran. One of my friends got caught because was trying to fight them off of him.

I got away because I was the smart one to get out of one car and run. But when we all got back to school they came and look for us. I didn't go to real class, I went to another class because I know they will look there. So when they check all the class I hop out the window and ran for 30 minutes. But when I got caught all they did was take me to my school and sent me home for a day or two.

-Juan

From The Beat: We wonder if you know what it means to be a victim. Here, you and your friend are being chased for trying to victimize someone else (by stealing a car), and nothing at all happens to you except you missed a day or two of school. How does that make you a victim? If you think being chased because you're breaking the law makes you a victim, you need to consult your dictionary.

Starting Fresh

If I was able to start fresh I think I'll be living the same as now, doing everything I do now but since I learned much more and what the consequences would be, I would be way smarter and slicker, wouldn't get caught doing what I do, and I wouldn't be in here. But other words fighting and violent stuff all aggressive stuff like that I like it loosens up my mind so I would definitely keep on doing that.

Would I try to avoid the streets and the trouble? I would only to make my mother proud because I know dat's what she wants to see. But for me, I love the streets, grew up in the streets, make money in the streets, streets helping me survive. In a way so I would want me to do what I do in the streets but for the trouble. I wish it was different way to get money without trouble because this system is not the spirit.

-Desmond

From The Beat: Well, Desmond, it sounds like you love the streets more than your mother! We know that isn't true, but when you say you're going to keep doing those things that you know your mother doesn't want you to do because you love doing them, that's another way of saying that some things are more important to you than your mother. That's too bad, because she is a grown person with lots of experience that you can't yet have (even with all your street experience), and she deserves to be listened to and respected. You say you wish there was a different way to get money without trouble, but it is so obvious that there is a different way, and most people are following that way — preparing themselves for life by going to school, getting a diploma, then using that foundation to get a job that pays a regular salary without risking any of the things you are risking by the way you act. Plus, your mother would be so proud!

Want To Change

If I could start over I would never robbed anybody. If I could start over I could get a job and work instead of doing crime. I can get legit money and pay for my stuff the right way. But doing the right thing isn't always going to be easy. Sometimes you might be a little wrong to do right, but if I can start over I would stay out of trouble and be cool.

If I can start over I would stop smoking and go to school more. But being locked up will make you want to change and do better and have a better life. Change is good and probably help you live longer than what you thought.

It's not easy being in Juvenile Hall. It's not like being at home when you can use the bath room whenever you want or eating whatever you want but appreciate what's on the outside nor what's on the inside.

-Christopher

From The Beat: Yes, Christopher, it is sometimes hard to do right. But, as you state in your last paragraph, it's also hard to be in juvenile hall with strangers telling you what to do and what not to do. In other words, you're faced with choices that are all hard. We hope you make the right ones. You don't have to worry about whether or not you can start over. Everyone can choose to start over every day of their lives. There's nothing to stop you from making those changes you wrote about — except your own thinking.

My Words

Was sup y'all? This me Lil' Kev. I'm going through some stuff. Check it out. I just got out of camp after six month. My sixteen days out I caught another case. I might go to the CYA but I hope and pray that judge'll give me a chance at ROP. I've been trying to get to the top for a while now, but every time I start getting on my feet, things go bad, and I mean bad.

Everybody out here hustlin' tryna make that money and do things that they was raised around. But tryna make pennies into bills ain't worth your life because I know it ain't worth mines. But if I think the way I do in here and take it to the outs I won't fail my love ones or myself. All the material thing in life ain't worth it. The people you so call boys, ninjas that you ride with ain't really yo bra. Ain't nobody care for me but the real ones.

Boys out there drinking, doing they thang, know you doing bad. They ain't poured a drop for you. But to my boys and baby that really care like my ninjas up at camp hollerin', Lil' Kev 'bout that love. So yeah, think on my true words.

-Lil' Kev

From The Beat: It seems like you have put yourself through a whole lot of unnecessary pain and negative consequences by "trying to get to the top," but it also seems like you've learned some lessons along the way. We hope that you remember how you felt when you were in here so that you don't ignore your own advice when you're able to make decisions for yourself again. It's easy to fall right back into the old ways, the ways that have become almost second nature, like bad habits. But bad habits can be broken. If you get that chance to go to ROP, how will you use it? If you have to go to CYA, what will your mindset be? The most important quality for success is what you bring to the table — a determination to change, a recognition that it requires inner strength and courage, and an ability to stick to it every day. We don't know if you're up to it or not. Only time — and your actions — will determine that.

Slick

If I could start over I would still rob people and do the things I do, but I would just be a better thief or be slicker. But I would go to school and try to make my mother proud and get a diploma and then go back to the streets.

-Darnell

From The Beat: Oh come on, Darnell. Give us a break... you're going to continue robbing people and doing the things you do, but you're also going to make your mother proud? Unless your mother is proud of having a thief for a son, we think it's impossible to do both. And we know oh so many people who thought they were slicker and better and would never get caught. We know them through their letters — they're all doing long stretches in state prison.

I'm The Greatest

I know I'm the greatest.

I went through the struggle slanging rocks just to know

I got to survive.

My life ain't the greatest.

Why my life is so wrong I don't know

But I keep asking god why.

My struggle ain't the greatest.

But I came a long way.

But it's hard to tell the streets good-bye.

I'm the greatest, I know I'm the greatest

My struggle I survive that's why I'm the greatest.

I was born in the town where it was all about money.

I was born in the no food it ain't funny

No food to eat, no cups when you thirsty.

My life was a struggle, man it was so ugly.

It was a hard day in the summer of 2005.

On the street slanging coke just to survive

Five-O pick me up pocket pull of dope,

Went down for slanging all I can say is no.

Did a year hard in the hall

No one to accept my collect call.

Going through hard times

Mama dead, my life is worse, man that aint all,

Getting up from the baddest fall

To get me back to this life I'll pass.

It the freedom I want yelling free at last, free at last,

My life was never right out of my home

For days and nights.

My struggle was a fight,

This pain that I feel is killin' inside,

Fight my case along with pride.

To go back ain't likely

My struggle the hardest it ain't nothing nicely.

I'm the greatest, I'm the greatest

We came from a struggle man we the greatest.

I'm tha reason fo' tha word greatest

Doing two years strong in tha hall

In ma' room wondering why mami

Won't accept my collect phone call,

Coming from the street now I'm a true G

Getting up from a difficult fall

Did a 360 and that ain't all.

I know I'm the greatest.

I am the one putting food on the table

Forget moms

Dad come in drunk as hell

I been put food on the table

Since I was 10

Dad been beating on mom since I was 5

That's why they call me the greatest.

I'm the greatest

Did six months straight in the hall

That's why I'm the greatest.

-Lil' Puerto Rico, Papi Chulo, Lil' Miami, and Jay Jay

From The Beat: So, which one of you four is the greatest? We're sure that you each are great in your own ways. What brought you guys together to write this particular rap? Do you come together and write raps often, or only when The Beat's here? We can't wait to hear the next one from the people that call themselves the greatest.

Bugga, Laron, D-Bo

Bugga: Man what's up! I'm up in here stressin'.
Laron: Man, I'm in here doin' cool, trying to bounce back.

D-bo: I'm about to get this weak ass release
Bugga: All you gon' do is make love with T-F.
Laron: They might send yo' boy to camp or a group home.

D-Bo: You better pimp that shhh bra
Bugga: I can't wait to get up outta here and see my boo.

Laron: I been thinking the same thing about my girl bra.

D-Bo: Y'all already know who I'm gon' see when I get out.

Bugga: D-bro, you about to get out, and me and Laron go' be still up in here stressin'.

Laron: Forget stressin', that's just gon' make my time seem longer.

D-Bo: Man what ya'll gon' be stressin' fo'? This little ass time? Ninjas be gettin' broke off years.

Bugga: I wish they gave me a little time they gave me two years an' you already knew who I'm stressin' off.

Laron: I just got 6 to 9 months in a camp or a group home and I'ma pimp that shhh 'cause that's what pimps do, feel me?

D-Bo: Just pimp that shhh.

-The End

From The Beat: Very cool to see that you chose this original script-style way of writing about your lives, and giving us a slice of your conversations. Next time, maybe you could touch on a specific topic, give us three points of view on the same issue? Like, in this chapter, we hear what you are looking forward to when you get out, and how you help each other when you're stressing, now what if you told us what you think it's going to be like when you're all free again?

Money and Cars

What I got into crime for. The money cars and the other things I could have, like the SI rims or GSR's mesh and all the 99-2000 bumpers. I want all the Civics Integras and V-tech motors I want.

Will I get out of these things, maybe. Maybe not.

-Zenki

From The Beat: With your knowledge for cars and love of cars, you should be working as a mechanic! Just think about it: With some training, you could be surrounded by cars all day, without all the shady! Plus you'd make good money, too!

Scandalous

What's up Beat? This me, Bama, writing again. I was supposed to get out a while ago, but you already know how the judges do ninjas scandalous all the time. I been in here 47 days and about go to court in the morning, but y'all will know if I get released or not because I'ma write next week. You already know who this is, Alabama Represente.

-Bama

From The Beat: Well, judges can't "do ninjas scandalous" unless ninjas give them power over their lives. Whether you're released this time or not, you will get out, and when you do, you would wise to find other activities that don't allow you to be treated scandalous by anyone in the system.

My problem

This weak-ass go up my straight release and they put me on EM for sixty days. It's still a release but I'm supposed to be at home. Right now I'm not even supposed to be writing to you, Beat Within. I guess I'm a be in here for some days now, waiting. It's gonna be boring but I'm gon' give it my best.

-D-Bo

From The Beat: You can do it. It doesn't have to be boring either. Look at that little play you wrote with your boys. You could use your lockdown time to read to write flows, maybe you and Bugga and Laron could even write a movie script!

RIP Brandon

Hey everyone. I am 17 years old, I am about to get out in two more days. I been reading The Beat every day I been in Juvenile Hall.

I have lost my friends close to me. If I could have my friends back, I maybe would not be in here now. My friend was killed: Shot in the face. I would give up any and every thing bad I ever done, just to have my friend back.

He would ride with me, smoke with me and would always be loved.

This is all I can say.

RIP Brandon

-Sam

From The Beat: We wish we had more to offer you than an RIP, and we wish your friend hadn't been taken. But we thank you giving us a memory of him. You've honored Brandon by writing about him, now can you honor his memory by making sure you live proud and FREE, the way he would have wanted to see you?

They Caught All of Us

I was off some grapes wit' my patnas and we needed some dough. So we went on one and hit some licks. We robbed like five people in one day. Then on the sixth lick the police was right around the corner and they gon' on us. We tried to air it but they caught all of us.

RIP to all those that's gone, y'all will always be missed and loved.

-Laron

From The Beat: Laron, please tell us you won't do anything like this again? In truth we are glad you're caught! Hell yeah! You out there terrorizing the neighborhood, robbing folks, man, you need to be off the streets! If you look back over this story, what do you see as your first mistake? We ask you this because we hope that recognizing it might help you not make it again, 'cause if you keep messing with people, hopefully sooner than later you'll be back.

Got Robbed

I got robbed by some ninjas and I ain't gone lie, I was scared. But I ain't trippin' 'cause fa one, they didn't really get nothing, and fa two, we know who it was so it's good.

-Z-Rider

From The Beat: How could it be "good" to get robbed, even by someone you know? Did this experience make you want to change anything about the say you're living? Like what?

Doin' Me Shady

Man what's up Beat, this Lil Bugga again. I'm still up on this unit, waiting on these people to come get me. I been up in here for four months, I'm ready to get up out of here. I'm tired of people telling me what to do and when to do it. I suppose to have been gone.

My PO playin' with me. She haven't even gave me my special visit yet they doin' me shady. An' this time don't count that I'm doin' man. I'm out.

-Lil' Bugga

From The Beat: Stay up - we've seen already how much fortitude you have. You've got your girl, your writing skills, your ability to maintain in the unit. You'll be fine—but when you DO get out, what's your plan then? We know you have real reasons to hope for a different lifestyle, but while you're waiting to get picked up, why don't you tell us what your plans are?

I Was A Robbery Victim

Yes, I got robbed for one hundred dollars. I felt bad because I had no money after they took it. I was in North Oakland. I did nothing because they probably needed something to eat or get some clothes or shoes or something, I guess. So I went home and slept on it.

-Joseph

From the Beat: It was very generous of you to let them get away with robbing you because you felt they needed whatever they got. If they had come up to you and simply asked you for money, would you have given it? If they had been caught, would have told the police or court that they needed the money more than you?

Step Yo' Game Up!

The reason I started committing crime is because I started hanging around with the wrong people. We were goin' around shootin' people with pellet guns. Armed robbery, stolen cars about six seven months ago I ran from Camp Sweeney, and the reason the judge sent me to camp was because I got into a high speed chase in a stolen car. I was on the run from camp for six months and when I got caught, them boys just brought me in on a warrant, and now the judge is tryin' to send me to the Y.

If and when I get out, I'ma change because this ain't the life for me. I don't like to be told when to shower, eat, etc... because I'm almost 18 so far as I see it, I'm a man. And I don't need no other man telling' me what to do.

Shhh got me messed up I had a cool lil' job before I came back up in here. I got me a cool ass car with TV's in the back of the head rest. So look what I got. I stopped robbin' people two years ago, and I still get money, so to all you robbin' and stealin', 'step yo' game up!

That's all I gotta say. Holla at y'all in a minute.

-Lil' Bama

From The Beat: We can't wait to hear the next installment of your life story, because it sounds like you're really at a crossroads: One direction leads towards getting straight, working your job, finding a new crew, and getting your money legit. The other could lead to running from a program, catching another warrant, giving in to the old devils. Which one do you think it will be? What's the next chapter?

A Whole New Day

Tomorrow is a whole new day. I don't know what will happen to me, or even if I will happen to be, or even if I will be alive. I might be out of Juvenile Hall or if I will be in max, but I hope not. Tomorrow would be the best day of my life, or I could wish it never came to pass.

-Jason

From The Beat: We never know what might come up. But do you really believe that you have no control over what happens to you? We can't foresee the future but we can prepare for it. Like they say, "if you stay ready, you don't got to get ready."

Starting Over

If I could start over and I knew as much as I do now, I would not be in this position. I would go to school, do everything legit, no smoking, drinking, selling drugs, and doing everything wrong.

Sometimes people make wrong choices or let themselves be influenced by other people. Everybody chooses their own destiny. People try to prove themselves to other cats 'cause they feel that it's more important to be accepted by the thugs than normal kids. They choose to go the easy way because the other way is harder. Just think before you do things. But if I could start my life over again I would.

-Lil' Goofy

From The Beat: Of course, none of us can start our lives over. But all of us can choose to live our lives in a different way, starting from today. The things you say you "would" do — go to school, no smoking, drinking, selling drugs— are all things you "can" do without going back to start over. When you get out of here, and you will, you will be back to making your own decisions. That's the time to make those harder choices to do right. Good luck.

Revolving Door

Hey Beat. This is Lil' Neph writing once more! Well time is flying by and now I have 11 weeks left! This time has been rough for me. But I've been staying strong and keeping my head up high!

I've planned for so much since I have been here. My life has been like a revolving door for me. I just wouldn't listen to no one until I got a little bit older and realized that this game that I've been playing throughout my life will eventually end, and this game I've been playing will be over and there will be no continue! So I might as well play my cards right and do what I have to do to make it in this world! So until next time pencil meets paper I'm out.

-Lil' Neph

From The Beat: You're right, Lil' Neph. You've been looking at the world through the eyes of a child, and you are not a child any more. Now it's time to prepare for a life that respects your parents and respects yourself by going to school, resisting the temptations that will always be there on the street, and making a life for yourself that doesn't include being a slave of the system, even a temporary one. It's so good to read that you've planned so much since you've been here. Can you share some of those plans with us?

What Good Is It?

What good is a diamond if it can't shine?
 What good is a watch with no time?
 What good is ya life if you can't live?
 What good is money if you can't give?
 What good is a sport if it ain't fun?
 What good is night if there ain't sun?
 And what good is a bone if it can't break?
 What good is some love if they ain't hate?
 What good is hands if you can't feel?
 What good is a gun if you can't kill?
 What good is ya clothes if you can't style?
 And what good is yo teeth if you can't smile?
 What good is a heart wit' no hope?
 What good is yo' block wit' no coke?
 What good is yo' ass if you can't tart?
 What good is a brain if you ain't smart?
 What good is ya back with no spine?
 What good is a chick if she ain't mine?
 What good is the hot if there ain't cold?
 And what good is my body with no soul?
 What good is a blunt wit' no purp?
 What good is a scrape wit' no skirt?
 What good is my eyes if I can't see?
 And what good is freedom if I ain't free?
 (To be cont...)

-Evans

From The Beat: Some of these questions are profound. They require deep thought and can produce many answers. Others don't move us in the same way. (For example, what good is yo' block wit' no coke sounds like a no-brainer to us: IT'S MUCH BETTER!) When you do the continuation of this piece, will it be more questions, or will you attempt to come up with some answers?

If I Wasn't In This

If I wasn't in this situation, I would be on the outs doing me. Staying solid. I woulda been in the house with my wife relaxed doing what the grown men do. I would be at school working on that high school diploma, so when moms get old she could count on me. I would be having a phat 9 to 5 getting mo' do' fo' sho.

I could be sitting in my Park Ave. I would be doing da right thang. But by me doing what I did, I put this whole movement in park. But when I'm done with Sweeny, bet believe I'm gone start.

-Lil' Quesada

From The Beat: When you say you're "gone start," we hope you mean start all those things you say you would be doing if you were on the outs — namely, going to school and graduating so that you can get that job and give your mom the support she needs. It's a matter of choices... yours.

Go Back To School

I will not have committed a crime because I was influenced. I will go to school and keep my job an' be in my child's life and never look back at the bad times.

-Joseph

From The Beat: Of course, you can't go back and undo the crime you committed. But you can go forward in exactly the way you wish — school, job and fatherhood. It means giving some things up, but it sounds like you are ready to do just that.

Freedom To Curse

I find this difficult to write without using extremely vulgar language.

When I was arrested I had jacked three bottles of booze, and when the cops arrived I had already been tackled and dropped by store security. When the cops walked up, I heavily used my First Amendment right. Basically, I cursed the cops out. But when I got to the car, they punched my grill.

Then when I was in court I had a charge with assaulting a "peace" officer for "spitting" on him. The only spiting I was doing was the blood flowing from my mouth. Forget the police.

-Dr

From the Beat: We feel you on this one, D.R., and we truly appreciate the fact that you know what the First Amendment is. But at the same time, "freedom of speech" is not without limits. The standard way that freedom is expressed in the law is: "You are not free to shout fire in a crowded theater." By cursing out the cops, you were doing something similar and you paid the price. Of course, none of that justifies for one second what the police did to you. It is one of the continuing tragedies of our society that those who "serve and protect" too often make a distinction between who deserves to be protected and who doesn't. Even though we know some very decent people who are police officers, we also know that your story happens every day. Besides your understandable feelings to want to hurt those cops as much as they hurt you, can you think of any long-term solutions to this problem? It seems to us that some cops (like some kids) need to be re-educated. How might that come about?

Victim And Victimizer

I been a victim before but it wasn't me being jacked or robbed. I been shot at plenty of times recently and in the past. Mostly because of stuff starting fights or people just don't like the people I'm with. But in other words my brotha got robbed before and after it happened me and my two otha potnas had to get involved with guns. Because of that and we ended up robbing tha person who robbed my brotha.

-Desmond

From The Beat: You say you and your partners "had to get involved with guns." We don't think you're being straight with us. No, you didn't "have to" get involved, you chose to get involved. There's a big difference. You know, the great Martin Luther King, Jr., (quoting the great Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi) said that "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth will lead to a blind society and a toothless civilization." A robbery for a robbery, a killing for a killing, a gun fight for a gun fight — where do you think that leads? Where are you?

Victim

A time when I was a victim was on my first day of summer school on the walk home. I got hit with a 32 ounce bottle in the back of my head. But you know Lil' B wasn't going out like that, yada-I-mean.

-Lil' B

From The Beat: Why did someone throw a bottle at you? Had you done something to provoke that attack? Were you hurt? Have you ever done anything similar to someone else?

Old Work

Dis ya boy baby! Shhh, I'm just gone tell y'all about ma old work. She was my everything 'cause I done had females from A to Z, but she just had that thang on me that made me just feel so good.

If I had three wishes I wouldn't even need 'em 'cause bein' wit' her she would already be 'em.

So dis piece go to all ma solid ninjas dat just got hella work, keep yo' other head wit' a hat on it and be easy. If you got a main piece stay out of jail and keep her in handcuffs.

-Motivation Jack

From The Beat: We don't know about the handcuffs part of it, but we do know that if you have someone this special in your life, you'd be a fool to risk losing her. So, since you're here and she's not, we have to ask: why were you a fool?

Starting Over

If I could start over I would not do the dumb things that I have done to get in the system; that way I would not be trapped in it. Being able to leave without completing 6-9 months in a group home.

Another thing I would do if I could start over again is not to drink or do as many drugs as I did do. It was another reason why I'm stuck in the system partially. I would say that these things would encourage me to start over and do what's right this time. I think that my parents would also agree with my decisions to start over and make positive changes.

-Fmt

From The Beat: Starting over with positive changes is always a welcome direction to go. We know you're right that your parents want you to make those changes, and we can see that you want to make them yourself. We hope you take that drinking and drug use seriously. We have seen too many young men and women go down the tubes because they thought that drinking was cool and refused to address it as a problem in their lives, until it took over their lives. Don't let that happen to you.

Feeling Trapped

I can't help but feel trapped
 It's like my whole life has been capped
 I have no idea when I'll be freed
 I am helpless in a time of need
 All these walls are sterile and white
 There's not even an end in sight
 All the guards yell and scream
 I want to wake up from this dream
 My loss of love brought me pain
 But I'm bound to jail with invisible chains
 I'm constantly under lock and key
 My heart still burns to be free

-Dr

From The Beat: Of course you are burning to be free. Freedom is the natural state of us humans, so it's natural to want it. But how much do you want it, D.R.? You may have no idea when you'll be free (and we can only imagine how much stress that uncertainty creates), but you will be free. So how do you see yourself living in freedom? Will it be same old same old (with the same old consequences), or will it be something different, something that will let you wake up from this dream and substitute a different, more powerful and positive dream? You know what we hope for...

My Family Brightens My Spirit

My child and my sexy wifey brightens my spirit because all the smiles, joyful, and happiness the things they do and say and emotions.

-Joseph

From The Beat: We hope you get a chance to get back together with your happy family soon. The Beat would prefer if you chose just one topic to write about, Joseph, instead of all three. When you write about three topics, you just have time to write one or two sentences each, and we can't learn much about you from one or two sentences. So next time, could you write about a single topic, but write a lot! Thanks.

My Mom Brightens My Spirit

The person that brightens my spirit is my mom, because whenever I see her she always has a smile on her face, and whenever I see her she makes me happy. She is my pride and joy. I can always depend on her for anything, and whenever she's down I'm down. My mom is my everything. She's always been there through thick 'n' thin, and I love her for that, and that's who brightens my spirit.

Another person who brightens my spirit is my grandma. Every time I see her she always smiles and never is sad. She is the best grandma. I also can depend on her for everything. If I need food she'll make it. If I need money she'll give me what she has. Every time I see my mom or my grandma, they always brighten my spirit.

Whenever something happens I get angry and sad and want to go out and whoop someone because my mom and grandma are my heart and they always brighten my spirit.

-Lil' Keazy

From The Beat: With the kind of love and support you get not just from your mom but also from your grandma, don't you feel that you kind of let them down by coming here? If they had one wish for you, what do you think it would be? We know what it would be — to have you home with them, and not to do those things that let the system take you from them. We're not sure we understand the last line of this wonderful tribute to two strong and good women. Do you mean that when you feel angry you want to go out and do something bad, but you stop yourself because of their love for you and your love for them?

Man, I Miss My Dawgs

Man I'm a victim of selling drugs 'cause I can't stop. But that doesn't matter 'cause I'm here now and it wasn't even me this time. But I guess that they just caught me for all of the other times that I was playing with stacks — or if you don't understand that, then rocks that I was playing with.

I'm a victim of all these problems. But I'm gone get out like always. I've been here for like two months in the game but this is stressful this time. Man, my patna getting smoked. Man, I couldn't go to the funeral, but you know I'm gone hold it down while I'm in here.

But man all my patnas gone hold it down til I come home. I'm gone hold this down but it do what it do. See y'all boys soon.

-Quail

From The Beat: If you think you "can't stop" selling drugs, then you are most certainly a victim — of your own childish thinking! Of course you can stop. We know far too many young men and women who have stopped to believe that you can't. You choose not to stop, and that is a sign that you are victimizing yourself by risking the greatest gift you have short of life itself, and that's your freedom! It's one thing to be a victim of circumstances beyond your control. It's quite another to be a victim because of your own choices which you do control. That is just sad. When you touch down, you better see all the friends and family you can as quickly as you can, 'cause with your thinking, you won't be out long.

Victim

Yeah, I have been a victim before. I think I was like 9 or 10years old and I was living in Daly City in some big apartments. It was like nine or ten at night, and it was only me and my mother at home and we were watching a movie when we heard someone on our balcony. We went to see what it was.

By the time we went in the living room we saw some guy at the sliding door on the porch. He was trying to get in, so we seen him and my mom starts to get really scared.

Around that time my brother's was staying with us and they all had guns in the house, so my mom told me to get it because she didn't know where they were. So while I went to go get my brother's .45 pistol, my mom was calling my brothers on the phone. They were on their way to me, and my mom was sitting in the living room while the guy was still trying to get in, while I was showing my mom how to load the gun.

Then he left and my brothers got there and took the gun from her and went to go look for the guy who tried to get in. They found him down stairs and pistol whipped him. They only hit him one time because my mom was there and because he was high off some real shhh. But he was acting crazy, so they let him go and we went back in the house.

-Erik

From The Beat: This is a scary incident, Erik. We're trying to imagine all the different ways it might have turned out, once guns were introduced into the scene. Drugs can make people do some really stupid, insane stuff, but then so can guns. In the end, we're just glad that nobody got shot or killed.

If You Could Start Over

If I could start all over I will not do any more bad stuff. I would go to school and do real good so I could make my mom and granddad real happy. I was supposed to get out of school this year, but I'm in here.

I wish I could start fresh. I would not even steal cars no more. I would make good grades and watch the people I hang out with so I could let them know they are getting into to.

You have to do what people tell you to do when they say do it, or have to drug test when your PO says so or get locked up for not going to school because you did not feel like it.

I wish I could start all over, but I will never get my freedom back.

-Birdman Jr.

From The Beat: That last line — I will never get my freedom back — chills us to the bone. That is a heavy burden to bear. At the same time, though, being locked up is not the same as being dead. You can still develop your mind through reading, develop your skills through writing, and teach those younger than you who you will meet along the way some of the valuable lessons you have learned.

I Would Give Up Anything In The World

... to get my grandparents back. Because if I could I would let them know how much I love them -- more than anything in the world., and I mean anything.

Because if they were alive today I would not do half the stuff I'm doing now, like smoking, and hanging out when I want to -- and I would for sure not be locked up in The Hall. I'm willing to give up everything because I love them so much.

And if they were here I would not talk the way I used to. Like they say, you don't realize something is gone and that is a true statement because I didn't realize till they were gone and I regret it to this day.

-Twan

From The Beat: Your grandparents are gone, but just think how much they loved you. That love doesn't go away, it's still inside you. And when you get tempted to do something they would tell you not to do, you can just look inside and we'll bet you'll still hear their voices guiding you in the right direction. Who have you been staying with now that your grandparents are gone?

On My Way To A Group Home

Damn it true, I'm on my way to da group home. The most thing I'm mad about is that I got to leave from the Bay to go to LA. I'm leaving my mom, all my ninjas and my 'hood for six months.

-Young B

From The Beat: Maybe a change of environment will be good for you. This could be the most important six months you've spent in a long while. What will you miss most about the Bay?

What it Do, What it Don't Do?

This is Cez, Beat if you only know how many people run they mouth about what they do on the outs, or wat they got. Most these ninjas be made out of plastic: When the heat on, they melt. I mean they see they enemies and they don't do shhh. They become cool if anything. RIP Lil Cell.

-Cez

From The Beat: Forgive us if we think it's kind of good to hear that people can still become cool with their so-called enemies. Think about it, if all the enemies joined together and started working together (legally, not illegally) to make the hood better, to clean it up, to help each other out, then there'd be a whole lot of empty beds in Juvenile Hall, and the cops wouldn't have much to do! Is that so bad?

What Happened To My County?

What's going on Beat. It's been a year since I wrote in the Beat. The last time I wrote I was in Hillcrest in San Mateo. I see you took my county out of The Beat Within. My problem is y'all taken' out my county from The Beat Within

See The Beat still ain't the same without my county. San Mateo is my hometown and I moved to Hayward.

-Nagnot Kid

From The Beat: We missed San Mateo too, and if you look closely you will see Hillcrest in this issue. It wasn't our decision to leave for well over six months, we valued and appreciated all of you writers there more than we can say. We want to say something like "at least it's good to have you back here" but that's only half true. We are happy to hear from all our writers, and we want to know how you're doing. We only wish it didn't have to be from in these four walls. How did you end up back in here? Tell us more about what has gone right and wrong in your life since we last heard from you.

Life

Did I choose a life of coldness and death? No I triumphed
In the world of life and health, I'm a giant

If the world came crashing down, would there be madness?

When living in this life of today is filled with sadness

I ran away from my hurt, by doing damage

Not knowin' that it's myself that I'm not understandin'

The pain that I caused just can't compare

To pain inside myself, a feelin' of despair

How many people can one man hurt

When he chooses to cut down work, and do dirt?

There's no way to show him that his life is a shame

Unless you lock him behind bars, and strap him in chains

Just remember that life is a game

And I'm gonna win, -CP- da name

-Cp

From The Beat: The game of life ends the same for all of us — in death. So how are you going to win? What's your definition of winning, and how will you get there? We can't answer your question about how many men one man can hurt, but we can see that by "doing work and dirt" one man can hurt himself quite a bit. To us, "despair" is a hopeless feeling, but your poem is anything but hopeless. So how do you balance the hope at the end with the hopelessness at the beginning?

If I Could Start Over

if i could start over with my life
i would have stayed in school
and got my life on track
if i could start my life over
i wouldn't be where i am now
if i could start my life over
i would learn from what i have been through
if i could start over
i would do unto others
as i want to be done
if i were to turn my life around
i wouldn't be who i am today
if i was to change my life
i wouldn't have known about The Beat

-Young D

From The Beat: If you could start your life over today, knowing everything you've learned from your mistakes along the way — maybe even the words you've heard others "say" in The Beat Within — hey now, wait up, you still can do all those things!

If I Could Start Over

... I would start my life over by not doing the same things I did to get myself in trouble. I also would take advantage of the lessons that I learned, too — if I think to do what I have done, I will know the outcome.

I would also love to make my mom more proud, by staying off the streets. For school, I would do all of my homework — so I could graduate and get out of school, period. I would also try to avoid a whole bunch of trouble.

-Lil' Dookie

From The Beat: What you say you would do, sounds like exactly what you should do. Why not just choose to make that fresh start? You know it's not about being hard but being smart. So make your mom proud, stay off the streets and away from that bad crowd.

Do It Big

What it do, Beat? It's yo' boy, Neezy, and today I'm write about doin' it big. I got eleven more weeks to go in this Ranch, and when I touch down, I'm a do it big. What I mean by doin' it big is by chillin' wit' the homies and stuntin' wit' a few females, 'cause you know how us stunnas do it.

So when I touch down, I'm a do it how I do it, and you do it how you do it, and we all know real big is the only way to do it, ya' dig?

-Neezy LCRS

From The Beat: We can understand why, especially after being locked up with a lot of boys, why you'd want to go out and have some fun. But at the same time, Neezy, some of that "fun" is what brought you to lock-up in the first place. We know too many youngsters who did it big, but only for a minute, and then found themselves back in the box. Don't be one of them! Besides having fun, you need to go to school too; you need to respect others; you need to truly love your freedom and avoid the mistakes of the past. Don't let yourself down.

Good Days And Bad Days

If you a real hustla, you should know what I'm about to say: When you have money, clothes, shoes, guns, weed, and a female — those are good days. But if you ain't got nothin like that, those are bad days. So all you want-to-be hustlas, step yo' game up, 'cause you broke ass ninjas is down an' out. So get yo' game up, then come holla at Da Birdman. I'm out.

-Birdman LCRS

From The Beat: So, Birdman, is this a good day or a bad day? Sure, you can go for the money, the clothes, the shoes, the guns, the weed and the girls, and feel the way a child feels on Christmas morning. But that's a child. Are you a child? Maturity means thinking beyond Christmas morning to the day after, and the day after that. Unless you start viewing reality from a more adult perspective — the perspective of a man — we're afraid you'll have your moments of fun followed by long periods of lonely isolation where the only good days are the ones in your memory.

A Victim Of Theft (My Own Thieving)

I was a victim of a car theft. I mean, I was the thief and that's what made me a victim. I was always stealing and riding with homies and smoking, but now I have learned my lesson.

When I got caught up for a car theft I had done, I became the victim of car theft, 'cause they took me to the Hall — and I was so afraid when it was my first time incarcerated! That's why I'm writing this piece, like a letter to my homies in the town.

The best thing that can happen is that they take you to Camp Sweeney, 'cause it is the best place to help you have a good life when you get out of here.

So that's why I stopped with my homies. And I hope I can stay stopped with this behavior I'd be doing out there with my homies. If I don't, if I can't stop stealing cars with them to ride around and smoke with them — I will move to a new city and start a new life.

-Johnny

From The Beat: Moving to a new place can help you make that new start, but the problem is really inside you — so you might as well beat it here. 'Cause if you want to steal cars, ride and smoke, you can find new friends wherever you go who want to do that, too. Maybe you won't though. Maybe you can make friends with squares when you're somewhere far from here.

Number One What?

ninjas don't wanna show
me no love
that's why they always giving me
fake laughs and hugs
but i ain't gonna sweat
'cause that mess gonna fly back
and hit 'em right in da face
and i'll be there
pointing my finger
and laughing right in your face
stomping the hell out da ground
'cause i ain't gonna quit

-Mien G

From The Beat: The thing not to quit is this program here that leads to your walking out free and clear. Don't let fools drive you to run away, 'cause the one who laughs last is the one who walks free one day with a straight release. All the rest of that drama isn't worth a single line of poetry. And we didn't print "Number Two What?" 'cause it just shows that they actually got to you. You don't have to talk like a rabid fool to prove Asians are real, too. Let your success be the only tool you use. Let your success be the news to give their egos a bruise.

My Mind

how i'm living is weird
it take a step back and look at my peers
i see fools running their mouth
some broad out on the track
they have a lot of nerve
to be calling me their b g
when they should already know
they talking to their o g
they wanna say this and that
but when shhh fly
they scatter like pussy cats
you could talk all you want
then lose your voice
and waste your life being scarred
with the sorrows that crawl up your back
you could act as hard
as a rock and soft as a worm
but in your eyes
is where i see the fear you try to hide
fake-ax muthamuggers

-Mien G

From The Beat: You're still way too caught up in what these fools at Camp say and do. You don't have to prove you're a G — O, Y, or B. Just keep writing your poetry till the truth stands up tall for all to see. And the winner will be the one who rises above the street, the one who really knows what it means to succeed.

Maxing Out At Nine Months

Wassup, Beat? This your boy, Gorilla. You feel me? Well, you know I'm still in this messed-up Camp. But I'm a G, so I'm going to probably max out — not six months but nine!

And the bad thing about it is that I'm not even going home on weekend passes. But I will be out on the streets sooner or later. You feel? This Camp or jail, ain't going to stop me. But anyways, to all in the Pens, CYAs, Ranches, Camps and Halls — stay strong. One love and respect.

-Gorilla

From The Beat: You're beginning to run into the problem of so-called "pimping" your time. In the end, you haven't learned anything at Camp, except maybe how far you can push staff before they write you up. If you'd taken the goal of moving away from gang banging and toward being committed to getting a real job, which would probably have included taking on work at Camp and training yourself not to be so insolent toward authority ('cause you know they like you, but that's not the point). Well, short and sweet: we're still worried about you — and particularly because you don't seem to be worried about yourself...

Take It From The Beginning

If I could start my life over, I would take it all the way back to the beginning of my life. I would then grow up and do things I didn't do in my previous life.

Fa'sho' I would erase all my time being locked up! I would go to school and not skip any classes, because down the line you miss out on a lot of things and regret not going. I especially would not commit the stupid crimes I did, because in the end all dat shhh ain't worth it.

Dat's why I try not to live in regret, because in the end all dat's gonna do is bring you down. I wanna look forward to having a clean start, because I wanna be successful in life. Just because you wanna do right, don't mean you squared up. It just mean dat you got a new perspective in life and you've matured. Stay up!

-Big Chris

From The Beat: You can't let yourself stay stuck in regret, that's true; but you have to let yourself feel enough regret to remind you not to do the same all over again. Plus, you make amends, like paying off debts. At the top of your list of people to whom you owe amends, is you; 'cause while you were doing what you thought you wanted to do, the life you messed up the most was the one that belongs to you. So don't keep making the same mistakes, and let that maturity show your new perspective is not fake.

Halfway Out the Door

Wassup, Beat? I'm halfway out the door. I got about three more weeks up here at Camp, and I'm out! I can't wait! The staff asked me if I was ready to be back out, and I told them, "Heil yeah!"

But I thought about how many people getting killed in Oakland, and I feel like I'm gonna have to watch out for the hatin' ninjas out to get me, them boys that hate to see a young ninja like me shine. But yeah, I guess that's all for now.

-Heem

From The Beat: Go back to the street grind and the haters will have you doing time at the drop of a dime, or some fool really will bust his tool at you thinking it makes him look cool. It's time to change your game, stop chasing street fame, and get your money on the same day each week — 'cause you got a job with a regular paycheck to keep. Then shine on your free time, which won't just be a break between locked up gates.

Choices

A lot of stuff bring me to the life of crime, like making bad choices and getting big-headed about stuff, and not thinking about stuff before I do it. When I'm on the block, that's taking a risk to be in this life of crime because ya might come across something and end up making the wrong choice.

-Lil' Igguz B1

From The Beat: Well, you have described a kind of scary existence. But you haven't explained a few things, like what bad choices are you talking about? And if you recognize the risks you take to be in this life (plus the risk of spending periods of your life answering to strangers who control almost every move and decision you make — places like this place for example, or worse), then what are the benefits that make those risks worth taking? If you had a child, would you be taking those risks?

My Life

My life is messed up because I am locked up. My life is gone because my freedom is gone. My life is messed up because I can't see my mom when I want to. My life is in the white man's hands that I don't even know. Now that's messed up.

My mom's life is messed up because I'm locked up. My dad always getting locked up so my mom told me that I'm going to be like him. But my life is messed up because of my mistakes. But my life have been okay since I been in here. When I get out of here, my life is going to be good for me. I'm going to school and get the rest of my education.

-Man Man B1

From The Beat: We were really relieved when we came to the end of this piece, Man Man, because at first we thought you were saying that your life is over, that your future would be no different from your past. So it makes us very happy to read that going back to school and getting the rest of your education is your goal. That's the way to create the positive future you want.

I Wish...

I'll give up my life to see my mom and dad get back together.

-Raymond B1

From The Beat: And we bet that both of them would give their lives for you. Just keep loving both of them.

Where Are You, Mom

Where are you Mom

When I need you

Where are you

When I want you

Mamma, I love you with all my heart

You're like an angel that bless me

You're a tooth fairy that give me money for school

Who kiss that shows a sense of care and love

Like I said, you're my mom.

Mom, I just want you to know I care and love you.

Without you, I will never be in this world today.

-Ronnie B1

From The Beat: Is your mom no longer in your life? Is that why you ask, "Where are you, Mom?" We don't know the circumstances, but we do know that as long as you can write poems about her like this, she's very much in your life.

Attracted To Crime

I am attracted to a life of crime because it's fun and enjoyable when there is no thinking of what will happen. It's like a function, there's an input, and to every input is an output. When they're doing the input they're thinking of a positive output, no they're not thinking of a negative output.

I really ain't got a lot to say but before whoever read this is thinking about doing anything, think of the worst that can happen. For example, if you get ready to rob somebody, you should think about if they got a gun and if they're going to shoot you.

-C-M B2

From The Beat: We think this is fine advice if it includes what getting shot actually means. Maybe death. Maybe living in a wheelchair. We really like your first sentence because it tells us exactly that you would like to live a life without consequences, so you don't think about them. The problem with that approach is obvious: here you are paying the actual consequences, the ones you didn't want to think about. So what will you change when you get out? How will you apply your advice to yourself?

Who Cares?

My problem is that I don't care sometimes because I don't be in my right state of mind, so I just whatever I feel I want to do. And then something always happens that I regret I did. And I like to get money so I do whatever it is to get it, ya heard.

-Lil' Igguz B1

From The Beat: What do you mean not in your right state of mind? Do you mean you don't understand there are consequences to your actions? Are you surprised when you are forced to deal with them? If your answer is that you know there are consequences and you're not surprised when they arrive, then you're in your right state of mind! You may like to get money, but right now you're making none (ya hear?) — except for the system.

Give Up The Street Life

I will give up this street life any time to get a good-paying job to make my family proud of me because I wanna do right. It's nothing in these streets for me at all. What brings me to the life of crime? Just being outside in the streets, you are target and crime is everywhere. I need to lose these bad influence friends and be by myself. And change my life and have faith I can do right. And I will as soon as I get released.

-Justin B1

From The Beat: We think it's admirable of you to want to make your family proud, and that you want to do right. But we don't think you can do that by being by yourself. All of us need help from time to time. There are things that none of us can conquer alone. We don't think you should try. Find a place where you can meet other young people with different interests, like at a gym or church or school. We know you can do it. (By the way, we combined all your pieces into one, because we prefer that you write a longer piece, like this, about just one topic, than three very short pieces.)

Taking Care Of Mom

Just got back home. Did three months in Hillcrest and at first they tried to send me to CYA. All for some shhh that I didn't even do. Just post drunk up all night until one of ma boys start to fight, and like the report said, "We tried to take his life wit' a knife." They also said it was premeditated, which is a bunch of bullshhh.

Funny how I call YGC home, but it is one step closer than being in Hillcrest. I could have been by my mom's side as I write this moment, because she is in need of me. But my PO wants to wait on it. He's not taking care of her, so why not let me. You only get one. I guess it's the job.

-Young D B2

From The Beat: We understand what you are going through right now and we can't really know if you are innocent or guilty. However, we do advise that the next time you decide to get drunk, think back to this moment in your life when you gave up control and let the system and your PO take you from your mom. Think about your responsibility for not being there with your mom, and maybe you won't drink at all.

For Family And Love

I think I would give up certain things like some of my personal things or something like that because I don't think anything can be worth what I love personally because I love my family and my girlfriend because I really love her. And I want it to stay like that. So I would give up a lot of material things. That what I say to that.

-Keith B1

From The Beat: You're lucky to have both a love family and a loving girlfriend in your corner. We hope you think about them when you get out of here so that you stop doing the things that let's the system take you from them.

Give Up The 'HOOD

I would give up my 'hood to get my cousins back. They died over some bs. Just because they had more money than some lady. Cats really be hurting.

-Money Earin' Vernon B1

From The Beat: Is that the only thing you'd give up the 'hood for? We hate to see you locked up again, so maybe it's time to give up the 'hood for you own life!

I'm Back

W'at's the word, b? I'm back fo' a petty ass warrant. I got out in November and got back in March. I got caught up having so much fun, like having Sway from MTV come to my 'hood. My big cousin had a cracking-ass yacht party wit' Crystal bottles everywhere, lobster tails. I was just having fun.

My big homie is doing positive stuff around the 'hood, like opening a clothes store. I went from popping Crystals to popping open carton milks. I went from eating lobster tails to eat fake pasta.

-Money Earnin' Vernon B1

From The Beat: There are a couple of pieces missing from this interesting story of fun and folly. First, while you seem to think the important words are "petty ass warrant," we think the important words are, "I'm back..." That's the reality of the situation, and to wish it away is to think like a child. But then, Vernon, risking the loss of your freedom so you could have your fun already tells us that you're not yet ready to give up childhood.

Nothing To Change

You asked me, "What would I give up to get something in return." Basically, I wouldn't give up anything for anything. Whatever I have, I earned it. Whether it was good or bad. So I wouldn't change anything. Whatever I'm goin' through, it is a part of my life. So I ain't really trippin'.

-Lil' Roach B2

From The Beat: We know you include "earning" the consequences you're now living, which is a way of accepting responsibility that we admire. Without changing anything in the past, you can still make different choices for the future. And we hope you will.

The Problem

The problem with me is I let the streets take over my mind sometime. Like when I was a young cat just coming out the house new to the block. Since I didn't know how the block was run, I'll sit back and watch how the other ran the block. Then one day I felt I didn't need no help on the block with the work I get put on with.

So one night I was on the block by myself. So a undercover cop came and ask for something for ten. I gave it to him. He walk off, then six minutes after five cop car pull up on me. I try to run but they had me surrounded. Then they put me in the car. That my problem to this day now.

-Yada B2

From The Beat: That is a problem that can be easily solved, Yada. All you need to do is stop hustling and then you won't have a problem at all.

Street Life

People I know always dying and sometimes I sit and think about w'at is going on in the streets. Then when I hear people say, "Why so many people got to die?" And the first thing I think is I don't know. Things be happenin' in 2006 that no one would ever think would happen. I think that if more people dying in the streets than in the war.

In the war they give you the right to kill, so when I get older I'm going to go and fight for America. When I'm done doing that, then I could get a house of my own and be done with school and on top of my shhh. Have me a nice girlfriend and some nice cars. Also be able to do what I want to and buy what I want to. This is what I'm going to work on when I get out this time.

-QBB B2

From The Beat: Here you are talking about so many people are dying and that you don't know why, and there you go saying you are going to join the military to fight for America because they give you the right to kill! Joining the military is not a bad thing, but if the only reason you are joining the military is because they give you the license to kill (which is not true) then you might not find it so easy to join. Your criminal record will also play a role, so we hope you make this the last one.

Life In The Halls

Let me tell you about the life in the halls. It's not easy being in here take showers with about three boys and that's not cool. Then you got to eat the same food every week over and over. But some of the food is cool but that weak breakfast.

Really need to go. Being a jail bird is not easy, that's why you need to be on your shhh on the outs and don't come back. If you haven't been to the halls don't come here and try to be cool because in here you might get your feelin's hurt. The staff is cool until you get to they bad side, then you be in your room for a day. I know how it feel to be in the halls, so people that reading this stay strong and be on yourself, and don't come here!!

-Young Pst B2

From The Beat: Thanks for describing to us and all the readers what life in the halls is all about. We hope that someone out there will hear what this young man has to say and take his advice. And we hope that when you say you "need to be on your shhh on the outs," you mean to stop doing the things that bring you here.

Why?

Why am I so shady?

Why? Why? Why?

Because on that block got to be about you' money

Man, I got to get out this place

Why?

-Lil' Money B1

From The Beat: So if you have no choice on the block, then why not give yourself some choices off the block? Like at school? At a job? We're sorry about your homie, Lil' Money, but The Beat doesn't publish RIPs any more.

Crimes For A Reason

I do crimes to get papa and things I need and fo' people who need the needs. Some people who do crimes sometimes does it fo' no reason, just like people who kill people fo' no reason and people who do it fo' a reason should know that you do the crime you do the time. If you willin' to do the crime you better make sure you could do the time.

If they so worry about us doing crimes why won't they worry about how Bush treat black people 'cause I really think Bush don't give a damn about black people.

Why won't they give money to the poor instead the wars.

-B B2

From The Beat: See, they justify their war in Iraq just the same way you justify some crimes as 'fo' a reason." We think you're right to call them hypocrites for spending a fortune on their war while ignoring the war going on at home. But we don't think their crimes justify your crimes. You might win the argument, but you lose your freedom! Who loses when young people commit crimes? We would love to have you write a piece just on the subject of why you think Bush doesn't give a you-know-what about black people. We would certainly put it in The Beat.

Almost There

I can almost see light at the end of this short tunnel...

Freedom... almost there... I can feel they're grip loosening

They realize the day is coming

But they ain't stupid. I can hear their whispers.

They're planning setting traps, setting traps everywhere.

They hate to let go so they make sure that when they do

I can be fooled, blinded and be recaptured.

-Baby Chino B4

From The Beat: How are you going to break loose from that trap or that firm grip? If you see that light of freedom and can almost feel it, what is to hold you back from it? What specific things do you have to do (or, more important, NOT do) in order to avoid the traps they're setting for you?

My Surrounding

In my surrounding there is thugs, hustlers, pimps, and drugs. My neighborhood is poor so we have to find money in order to live and take it to the next level to get rich.

Man, this life ain't easy. Only real Gs has this system. That's why we're vatos to qualified for the job. I tell you something. I won't work for 10 bucks an hour. I'm going to think I'm a slave that's why were gangsters.

-Juan B4

From The Beat: And that's why gangsters end up slaves to this jail system or six feet under, Juan. You say working for \$10 an hour makes you a slave, but here you are locked up, answering to a bunch of strangers telling you what to do and when to do it, when to go to the bathroom, when to eat, when to talk and what to say. Here you are wearing someone else's underwear and sleeping in someone else's bed, taking a shower with other young men, and not a female to be found anywhere... So, because you won't work for a living, you've allowed yourself to become the slave you fear becoming! This makes as much sense to us as avoiding school to get your education, waging war for peace, or eating a lot of sweet foods in order to lose weight... Look around, vato, and tell us what you see. And where you are right now is like a fairyland compared to the places the system is just holding for you down the line...

It Ain't But Temporary

Wassup wit' tha Beat? This ya boy Young Jeff up here in B2 doin' shhhh, but just bein' bored as hell, just knockin' my time out. This ain't shhhh but temporary. My attorney came up here today March 14, 2006 and was on some.

This placement in Woodland Hills by LA did not accept me, so they sent another package out to this placement in Long Beach. If they don't accept me, then they go tryna send me to ROP program in Nevada or in CA by Reno. But if they tryna do that, I'm just gonna ask for George Junior in Philadelphia, feel me.

But I'm out of here man, but stay up.

-Young Jeff B2

From The Beat: Sounds like you are have planned out where you want to go if they can't find you a placement. What you going to do after you get to placement Young Jeff? What are your plans? You're right when you say "this ain't but temporary," but then, that's true of life itself. It's all temporary, so use it wisely.

Erica

I need you, I miss you

Haven't seen you, want be with you

Need to see those sexy lips

Need to have that special kiss

I miss you deep inside

You're so gentle so kind

Need to see those beautiful eyes

I love you I ain't afraid to admit it, I won't lie

Won't see you for a year

But my love will always be near

Love you Erica

-Lil' Roach B2

From The Beat: Being away from the one you love can be one of the most painful things about being locked up. We hope when you're out of here, you'll remember just how much you missed Erica so that you won't risk losing her by coming back. We hope Erica will understand your love for her.

Trapped In A Hoe

Man, my grandmother always told me to don't have any problem while I go outside. I would tell her I won't and have a nice day, I love you. Then, next thing you know, I end up in YGC. "High granny. How you doing? I love you," over the phone.

Man, I wish I could come back but now I'm on my to a group home. Man, I wish I would have listened but on the other hand, I was doing me. I love myself and can't nobody tell me I don't. But I'll be back soon. I hope so you know the hype, forget the system. I don't give a damn about nobody that works with them.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: If you love yourself M Beezy, you won't do anything that might bring harm to yourself or place yourself in a messed up situation like the one you are in right now. That's certainly not the way to show your love. And how much love are you showing your granny by allowing yourself to be taken from her? We applaud you for wishing you had listened before ending up here, but we have to ask: Why will you listen this time if you didn't listen last time? What has changed for you?

First Step Solving My Problem

The way I can solve my problem is by people leaving me alone. I am tired of people talking to me about unnecessary stuff, about issues that don't mean nothing to me. There's really nothing that can solve my problem right now. I am trying to live a young crazy life while I can. That's just one of the first step of solving my problem. I know I solved some problems but they're personal, but they're also not going to help me so it ain't that important. So that's all I got to say I am out.

-Sleepy B2

From The Beat: Young crazy life, huh? How do you define that young crazy life? Sometimes by trying to live to the fullest only will bring you down in the long run. You seem to think that the young crazy life you want to lead now only has consequences as long as you're young and crazy. Sadly, that isn't the case. Some consequences that begin in childhood can haunt us till our dying days.

Live Without Consequences

The reason why I chose this life is 'cause it's the only thing that caught my attention. Like the adrenaline of going 70 mph through all intersection. Doing what we want when we want and however we want it to be done. If it's with our hands or with a gun but that's something I really shouldn't get into.

-Pinguino B2

From The Beat: When this crazy life style caught your attention, did the hand book tell you that there were consequences, or were that the small print that you did not pay attention to? You might be able to do whatever you want, whenever you want, and however you want, but there are still laws that exist and apply to everyone. A life without consequences exists only in the mind of children or those who want to remain children. Do you? Think about that.

Home Or Group Home?

Que honda? (What's happening?) Aqui estoy (I'm here) again con el Beat. I just wanna tell you that I'm happy because this Friday is my court and I might get out and come back home with my family and my homies.

But that other way I'm mad because my PO came to see me and he messed up everything. He say that I have 50% to come back home or go to a group home. That's why I'm kind of worry about my freedom.

I just hope to go home with my family and my homies. If I don't get out for this week I might write you again.

-M B2

From The Beat: Well, by now you know the outcome. Have you ever heard the expression, "Hope for the best but prepare for the worst?" Which did you get?

Fresh Start

What I'll do to get my freedom is that I will start all over again, but not go back in time... well, I suppose I could if I could go back and forth. But if I was to change my ways, I would train myself to be smart and learn new things every day and try to absorb something out of life.

When I get out, I'ma get a chance to start all over again. Also when I get out I'ma change the way I handle things.

-Eugeon B4

From The Beat: How will you train yourself to be smart? Do you mean you are going to go back to school and educate yourself? We like the fact that you realize you really can start over again when you get out of here. We hope you follow that plan. What's the first step in your plan for change?

Life Of Crime For Freedom

If I was to give up something I will have to say I would give up my life of crime to be back at the house with the wifey and the baby and to be back at the schoolhouse and I would have listen to the wifey. I would be at home being with mom. But me being hellas dumb, now I am locked up at YGC.

Sometimes it is bad, but on Friday, I am going to Log Cabin for seven months. And I when I get out I am not going no farther because I'm going to make better decisions to keep me free and alive. It's going to be me, the baby and the wifey so I can stay my ass out. No more hyphy shhhh. So I am out. Say up Beat Within.

-DesePay B4

From The Beat: So you are giving up your life of crime for your freedom, huh? That's good to know. When you say you're going to make better decisions, can you give us some examples of those better decisions you plan to make? And by the way, you are not dumb at all. You're still pretty smart because you still know what is important in your life and what is not.

If I Can Start Over Again

If I can start from scratch I would bring my pops back and stay away from so-called homies who was really J-cats, bring my smarts up from a bucket to a expensive Mayback, do the tiring work in the present, and in future lay back, start rappin' earlier so I could've brought the Bay back, move my family out the 'hood. But I'm gone do that ASAP and I'm gone be cautious in the making 'cause haters they hate that. Keak the Sneak make haters bag, but I'm gone make them stay back.

-Eazy B4

From The Beat: How are you going to make haters stay back? Man, that first sentence is a long one, filled with things you would like to do over. But since you can't redo the past, what changes do you plan to make in your future that can bring about some of these results without risking your freedom again?

What Draws Me To A Life Of Crime

What draws me to the life of crime is probably the thrill and knowing that I have a chance to get away with whatever I do and that it also affects other people. What else that drew me to crime is just the rush and the excitement. But now that I compare it with all of the things that I've temporarily lost, it's not worth it and I wish I could go back in time and change it.

-Trace B4

From The Beat: You might not be able to go back in time to change the past, but you can start right now and make sure that it doesn't happen in the future again. There are many ways to get that sense of excitement and thrills without risking your freedom. Maybe you should try to go to school and try out for a school play. We bet the thought of acting in front of a big audience scares you — and that nervousness translates to real

Stressing

I really stressin' up in here. My thoughts ain't clear and I wonder when I am leaving here. I see people leaving and coming right back. If I had the chance to leave, I ain't comin' back. All these cats playing with their freedom.

When I get the chance I am be sittin' on the side with my football team happy we won. I'ma do something with myself, make my pops proud even if he ain't alive, livin' in a big-ass mansion where me my wife and kids will reside. Yeah, I got plans for myself and that's a fact when I grow up my pockets go be phat and I ain't talking 'bout no punk-ass chump change. I am talk 'bout ride in Maybacks and dub out range. Yeah and that's a fact. While y'all sittin' here on y'all backs I'ma be sittin on racks.

-Doc Ed B4

From The Beat: Would you mind sharing with us your plans for getting rich? Do you think living in a big mansion is what would make your pops proud of you? Do you plan to make your money playing football? If so, you better get your education because that's still the foundation for any kind of decent future.

Pretty Boy

Yeah, it's me again, still here in B5. I got a fade, yeah, a haircut, but I'm still the pretty boy in this unit. Everything is good, but some of my ninjas is going to the Ranch. But it's all good.

I'm still here. Like Jack always say for real though, "Stay in school. don't be a fool."

Oh yeah, it's yo' boy, Young Fabe. See y'all next week. Let me out, though.

-Young Fabe B5

From The Beat: Have you ever heard the expression, "Beauty is as beauty does?" Well, we want to change it a little to read, "Pretty is as pretty does." To us, the "prettiest" one in the unit is the one who has made up his mind to stop doing what puts him behind walls, and start doing what puts him behind a desk in the classroom. By that definition, are you still "the pretty boy in this unit?"

My Freedom For My Brother

If I had to give up one thing to get something back I would give up my freedom to get my brother back because they not gone take my freedom forever but when somebody dies that's that. They gone. So if I could make that happen, my life would not be like it is because if my brother was here, he would keep me in line and out of all this madness that going on around me.

-Lil' AJ B2

From The Beat: You must have been very close to you brother. We're sure he wouldn't want you to trade your life for his. He'd want the same thing that you want, which is to both be there for each other. You keep your brother's memory alive as long as you live, so respect your life as you respected his.

What I Need Vs. What I Want

The problem is that sometimes I want things that I can't get. So I start getting money on my own, start selling rocks or them thangs just to getting it how I live.

-D Wig B4

From The Beat: You noticed that half your piece is gone because you should know better than to glorify where you're from. We had to leave the rest of your piece out because it was inappropriate.

I Was Raised Into A Life Of Crime

What drew me to a life of crime was the way I was raised. I was raised around stealing, fighting, and shooting and that's how I grew up. I had to steal to survive and eat, and to help myself out to buy food, clothes. If I didn't I couldn't eat and had to wear the same clothes until I came up with the money to buy new clothes and to eat.

I had it hard growing up 'cause I lived in the ghetto 'hoods, so it was really a battle to survive 'cause if you didn't do this you pretty much couldn't eat or had to wear the same clothes, and this is all 'cause I didn't live at home for a long time. I lived at a house with my homies and that's what brought me to a life of crime.

-Criminal B4

From The Beat: Why weren't you living at home BH? Would you have had to steal to eat or buy clothes for yourself if you would have just stayed at home instead of living with the homies? Do you think your life would have been better if you weren't living in the ghetto? Is it easies just being in juvenile hall where you don't have to steal to eat, or do you think there is another alternative you haven't thought of yet?

Money At All Costs

I would give up a G
To get back free
But again ain't nothing to me
But I'll give up two rocks
To get back
In fact
I'll give my whole stack
Just to be back
Where I'm from
So I could get it how it come.

The thing that draws me to the crime life is money. Money is a major factor and the only ways I know to get real money is the illegal way.

-C Cheese B4

From The Beat: How do you define real money? Is working at McDonalds not real money? Or working for \$10 an hour? You should start to learn how to make money the legit way or else life for you will be very hard. Money is not free. Either you work for it, or you steal it and then pay the price you're paying now — or much worse. If the only way you know how to make money is the illegal way, then it's up to you to learn about other ways to make it. If you keep making it the way you've been making it, then you can count on the system to keep treating you the way it's been treating you... only worse.

My Problem

My problem is that I love to be out party and get money. But I don't know if that's problem even though that problem keeps bring me to jail.

-Carmell GU

From The Beat: Does that mean you don't know if coming to jail is a problem or not? If you really don't know, then you really do have a problem! We already told you that your love of partying and money keeps putting you deeper into a hole where there are no parties and no money! So, all we can hope is that you grow up and face your responsibilities before the consequences get even more serious. And by the way, The Beat would rather have you choose just one topic, not all three, to write in more detail about. Your three short pieces don't tell us as much as one longer piece would. So, next time...

Let Me Tell You My Problem

It's Bones and I haven't been in this weak-ass YGC for two years because I was on the run. Yeah, I got a baby boy (10 months) now and he the reason why PO letting me out tomorrow.

But first let me tell you how I got caught. I'm wit' my BD walking to the store. As soon as I turn, that ninja right there. Man I was hella mad. But guess what. I ain't coming back because this boss can't mess up no more 'cause I got a little ninja to look after. So bye for the last time.

-Li'l' Bones GU

From The Beat: Well, if it took becoming a mother for you to make the leap from being a child to being an adult, then we're just happy you've made it. Congratulations! You now have a responsibility in the free world that holds more value than everything YGC has to offer plus all that the street life has to offer — and to take away.

Real

To keep it real, what drew me to this life I lead was the love of money fo' real. The love of money I developed at a young age, and ever since then, I stayed on that same hype.

But now I developed a master plan on how to get money the real way. I knew and know too many real OGs to let this fake justice system beat me.

Until next time we meet, this is the sound of The Beat.

-Chill Will B5

From The Beat: Well, does your master plan involve risking your freedom? If so, we don't think it's much of a plan. If you mean by "fake justice system" that it doesn't provide justice, we agree with you. But if you mean it can't hold you down, we thoroughly disagree with you. There's nothing fake about the ability of the cops, the DAs, the POs and the judges to keep you their prisoner for periods of time, both short and long. You're smart, but smart ain't enough. You also have to be wise.

My Life For My Father's

I will give my life if my father come back to life. 'Cause you know, if you love one person, you do anything for that person.

If I had a baby I will change my life, 'cause you need to take care of that baby, you know. So I will change everything on my life.

-Slow Pain B5

From The Beat: So, if you had a baby, you'd be willing to change everything in your life for the love of your child? Well, why not look at your father's child, and change everything for the love of him? Which is you...

What's Your Problem

Because I'm addicted to what I do and I need the cash and the Gs.

-T-Tosh

From The Beat: Well, we hope you know that your addiction has very negative side effects, including long stretches of your life as a slave to strangers telling you what to do and when to do it. Oh, yeah, and during those times — like right now — there's not a G or piece of cash to be seen anywhere! By the way, we would rather that you not write on all three topics. We would rather you choose just one topic and write more about it. You can't really say anything in one or two sentences. Next time...

I Been Had Skills

Here comes Li'l' Lazy once again

Just give me some paper and a pen and I'ma start releasing all my stress and pain.

This life is crazy and it's real

That's why my homies knows that I'm crazy and that's fo' real
So you know I been had skills to pay the bills, sell thizz pills,
flip a quarter to a mill, see kilos, and hide my bills,
take trips to Brazil, got everything from full clips to ice grill
and a big house on the hills

I been winning wars; on the battle field I had lost some souljas
That's why I stay blowin' on the best dojo to forget the pain

-Li'l' Lazy B5

From The Beat: We took out everything after you started talking about getting your revenge because The Beat is not the place to threaten people. What we see here is someone who thinks that words are what counts instead of deeds. The fact is you're locked up tighter than wall safe, and apparently you don't know it! All those skills you boast about haven't kept you from becoming a slave of strangers telling you what to wear, when to talk, when to go to the bathroom, where to sleep, what to eat, etc., etc. You're "the best" but you can't keep yourself from being handled like a commodity by strangers. It sounds to us that you need to develop some other skills that don't involve taking trips to Brazil or threatening death to your enemies. Or, maybe not. Maybe you like having a "room," three meals a day, and people telling you what to do... The sad thing about it is that in the bigger picture, people like you amount to nothing more than money circulating in a system that was designed to get paid off your pain and stress. You think that you are above the law, when really you're criminal behavior has already been predicted and counted on, and there's a hard bed in the pen with your name and number on it. Of course, all that can be changed — but only by you.

My Little Girl

My little girl my world
October 9th, 2005 is the day of your birth

My little girl my world
I loved you right from the start even before I even knew that you were a girl

My little girl my world
Through the painful 15 hours of pain that I went through to bring you into this world

That made me have more love for my baby girl
My little girl my world

I'm sorry that your father left us all
Alone I'm sorry that he left and never came back home

My little girl my world
When I left the hospital I knew from that point on I was bless to have such a beautiful little girl in this tough world

My little girl my world
Mommy loves you so much more
It seems like just yesterday you were in my belly
It's crazy how time flies you came out 7 pounds 0 ounces and 18 inches

I just want you to know that I love you more then anything in the world

You're mommy's baby girl.

-Li'l' S GU

From The Beat: The love of a parent for a newborn child cannot be described. We want you to remember just how much your own mother loved you when she first held you in her arms — and we want you to love that child as much as you love your own!

Home Doin' My Thang

Man if I could give it back man I would of never been where I was at and just asked one of my family members if I could get some money to get home and I would've never came up in here, and I would've never knew I had a warrant and I wouldn't be stressin' myself out right now. I would be at home doing my thang ya hea' me.

-T-Tosh GU

From The Beat: So you would give it back in order for you to run from a warrant that wasn't going to disappear no matter what. Running from warrants is like running from life. It can't be done. Sooner or later it catches up to you.

What I Would Give Up

I would give up the finer things in life to gain the trust back from my family. All of the material things don't mean as much to me as much as my family's trust.

-Princess GU

From The Beat: We appreciate this, and it tells us that with time, you will win back the trust you lost. Trust is like money in the bank. You can overdraw. But you can also build up your account again, if you're slow and steady.



Give Up To Gain Up

Yo, wasup Beat Within?! Er'time I try to come to the classes, I get room time. Now that I'm finally in... it's my last time here! But yeah, my second time in here, my last. Y'all won't see me actin' like a crackhead.

If I could give up som'in' to gain som'in' back, I would give up all the drugs and money I earned from it to gain back the time I spent. My problem is my boyfriend jumped me when I was in here. I might go to a group home and I'm unhappy.

-The Crackhead GU

From The Beat: It seems to us that you have a more basic problem than your boyfriend. You say you won't be acting like a crackhead, but you sign your name crackhead... If you have a problem with crack, it will make all your other problems that much worse, so we hope you deal with it, if there's something to deal with. Good luck on the outs. We don't want to see you here again!

Can't Wait To Get Out!

Damn! I can't wait to get out of this place. I got two more weeks to go. I'm happy because I wouldn't have to see the staff. I don't really mind seeing Ms. Sylvester, Ms. Smith, Ms. Shaw, and Ms. Rivas, even though Ms. Shaw and Rivas sometimes have they bad days. I can't wait to get out because I'm gon' get to see all my friends, get to go back to school and have a job, but chea, that's it...

-Nefty GU

From The Beat: We wish you only good luck, Nefty — and of course the wish that we never see you again locked up!

What's Your Problem?

My problem is I need the cash and the credit cards and I can't stop what I'm doing because I gots to be suited and booted with the fancy things that I wanted. Hopefully something can change my life, or I can go to a program to make me stop.

-Ni GU

From The Beat: Well, you may need a program to make you stop. But you also need to grow up! Just because you want to be suited and booted doesn't give you the right to take money or property that someone else has worked for. Being an adult means, among other things, the ability to put off what we want until we are able to get it the right way. Being a child means, among other things, "needing" what you want right now! Time to put away childish ways, and step up. (By the way, we wish you would only write about one topic and not all three. That way you could give us more details and write a more interesting piece.)

What I Would Give Up

I would give up my anything to be home with my mom and family and friends, just to be able to walk the streets again and smoking weed with my friends and just be able to be free and on the out side.

-Jessica GU

From The Beat: Well, of course that's easy to promise when you're locked up like a slave. But what will you sacrifice on the outs in order to stay on the outs?

What Drew Me To Crime

The only thing that drew me to crime was the money. I was a young starving project baby needed some dough. Met up with the my folks, robbed a ninja. Then like five days later got greased. My problem is I'm addicted to money.

-Tae GU

From The Beat: You used the phrase "young starving project baby." Were you truly starving, or is that just an expression? Stealing to eat is one thing. Stealing because you're addicted to money is something else. One can be stopped. The other...?

What Would You Give Up To Gain Something Back?

I would tell the people who did the crime so I would not be in here.

-Paris GU

From The Beat: Do you mean that you're here for not snitching on the ones who are truly guilty? That's a tough position to be in. (Next time, Paris, write a little bit more about just one topic, not two or three. Thanks.)

I Need Money

I need money so I could have clothes so I can stay up on fashion — the new clothes, shoes and everything that you like to have. I like having my hair done and buying the new things that they come out with. That's what drew me to the crime of prostitution.

-Jessica GU

From The Beat: Well, look at the high fashions you're wearing now, and all the pampering you get. Where are the things that all that money is supposed to buy? You can't even go to the bathroom when you want! Your desire for instant gratification ("I want it so I'm going to get it!") is a child's way of looking at the world. Worse, the consequences can be held against you even after you mature into adulthood!

My Problem

My problem is that I get mad and stressed out, and when I can't take it no more I would leave and run to my family it make me relaxed.

-Jessica GU

From The Beat: This is just another example of instant gratification. You find it hard to put off what you want, and that is a sign that you have some growing up to do. Part of it will come naturally with age, but part of it has to be your own determination to make it happen. By the way, The Beat would like you to write about one topic and not all three. When you write one-sentence or two-sentence pieces, you can't really get under the surface of things. Try picking one topic next time, and writing more details about it.

All Out Soldja

This life of mine is kinda insane
At times I have thoughts of cutting my vein
I miss the dead homies, got too many to count
I just got these thoughts and visions of getting out
This life of mine will bring you tears
Went to jail for murder only served three years
Things can get ugly in da 'hood
You really gotta be an all-out soldja.

-Brito-Boos GU

From The Beat: This is where being an all-out soldja has got you! Because you're a juvenile, you get another chance. But if you keep following the path of your dead homies, you will soon run out of chances. Don't wait til it's too late to make different choices.

Money Drew Me To Crime

The money. I really needed it so I had to do what I had to do to get me some money quick and fast even though I caught myself up.

-T-Tosh GU

From The Beat: Did you need that money to eat and survive, or did you want that money to get you things you couldn't afford to buy? There's a difference between needs and wants.

What Would You Give Up?

I don't really know what I will give up, but I think I just need to learn from my mistakes.

-Carmell GU

From The Beat: Learn from everything — your successes and your mistakes.

What Drew Me To Crime

I think it was the situation that I was in with my parents because I never really had communication with my mom. So basically I did the crime for money and because I like to be out and travel.

-Carmell GU

From The Beat: We agree that you have to work on your communication problems with your mom. But you can't use those problems to justify your own decisions because you're the one that faces the consequences. So, while you like money and being out and travel, look around. No money, no travel, and no freedom!

What Drew You To Crime?

Being around the wrong people.

-Paris GU

From The Beat: If we asked those people what drew them to crime, would they tell us that you were the wrong people?

Fatal Attractions

Started off young
On a mission to get pleased
Lured by tha fatal attractions
Of tha streets
I pictured life at its full peak
So my vision was blurry
Unable to see
Tha reality
So I continued to pursue
My only satisfaction
At tha time
Crazy gang life
Tha adrenalin rush...
I neva really remember
Feelin' that way
Lookin' back on childhood
An' just feelin' tha pain
Not wantin' to continue hurtin'
Been waitin' for this sunny day
"Forget" the rain
An' the pain
To be real
I'm a continue livin' this life
God haven't gave me the strength
To change
So I guess
This ain't meant for a change!

-Flaco LCERS

From The Beat: This piece starts with such insight and promise, Flaco, that we are really let down and disappointed by the conclusion! You seem to say that the temptations of the streets appealed to the child that you used to be, but now you see the world through more adult eyes. But then you say you don't have the strength to change, and we think that's still seeing the world through child's eyes. God has given you exactly the same strength that everyone else is given, but it may be that you don't have the courage to tap into that strength. Yes, it takes courage to try something new, to look at the disasters of the past and say, "Enough!" We are truly afraid that if continue believing that there's nothing you can do to change the way you live your life, you'll be writing wonderful poems from dark prison holes, reminiscing about the thrill of freedom. We hope we're wrong...

Heads Up

What's up Beat Within readers! This ya girl The Uptown Princess. I had court today. The judge said that they gon' bring my case to trial so I'm gonna be here for another few weeks. But hopefully at the next court date I'll get to go home on ankle monitor... We'll see what happens.

-Princess GU

From The Beat: With those weeks ahead of you, we hope you spend some time thinking about the changes you want in your life when you get out of here. We know it's tempting to focus only on walking out of here, but it's after you walk out that we want you to focus on, so that you create a plan that let's you stay out and free.

Let Me Love You

Baby, you should let me love you
Let me be the one to hold and caress you
'Cause, baby, you'll always be my boo
And I'll always stay by your side
Even the times when you cry
The times when you 'down
And have that frown
On your face
'Cause, baby,
I just wanna be with you
And have your taste
Baby, I want your attention
So I can show you my affection
Baby, I'll love you with all my heart
And I promise you we'll never part
And when I'm not with you
You're always in my thoughts

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: Well, Ngo, as sweet as this love poem is, there are some things that just don't add up. You promise you'll never part, but aren't you parted now? It seems to us that you must have loved something else even more than you love her, because you weren't thinking of her when you did whatever it was that let the system take you from her. We hope you get your priorities straight, so that you can make some crucial changes in your life, the kind of changes that truly will allow you to spend the rest of your life with the love of your life.

Tattoos

I like any design you get
Even if you get one of your set
Me, personally, I'm really gonna start
To me, tattoos just another way of art
Just another way of expressing
Just another way of identifying
And ninjas really trying
Ninjas really lying
You see
Me
I'm going to get a quote
So you put in your mind
And let it soak
And I'm also going to get a dragon
To me it's just another way of tagging
To me, I think it's cool
To have a tattoo
But I don't want it 'cause it's cool
I want it because I like it

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: We like looking at tattoos, but we're afraid to put a needle to our body... And we want to urge you to be careful that all the tools the tattoo artist uses are sterile, because you can get Hepatitis C (and worse) from dirty tools. It's your body to paint as you like. When you've got those tattoos you want, can you give us an exhibition

Almost Out Of The Ranch

What it do, Beat? This ya boy, G High. I've been gone for a minute, but I'm back now. I got five weeks left; then I'm touching down. Ninjas better duck and cover, and throw on their 3D glasses. I'm go' be on some positive shhh, though. I'm 'bout to go eat. Dead end. Holla back.

-G High LCRS

From The Beat: Welcome back, G High! We've missed you. We hope, when you're free again, that you truly start over and stay on the positive. When you write that ninjas better duck and cover and throw on their 3D glasses, what are you trying to say? You don't need any more tragedy, destruction, or more time missing from your life, so a word to the

Is This Enough?

Look, I got something to get off my chest
It kinda like a bulletproof vest
I wanna tell you — shhh got me stressin'
Making me do things without thinkin'
Never hesitating to back up what I say
'Cause this young cat don't really play
Messing around and fell in love
Askin' myself, "Is this enough?"
Smokin' a cigarette and takin' a puff
'Cause I know I messed up in life
Just looking back at my life
Holding this knife

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: You thought you knew all you needed to know before you fell in love, and then everything changed. So, Ngo, we hope you see that life is always changing, and that what you're feeling today is not what you'll be feeling tomorrow. Looking back at your life and the mistakes you made is a very useful exercise, but only if it serves as a guide to a better life, avoiding the mistakes of the past.

Gotta Let You Go

I wanna ask you a question
Do you really love me?
'Cause, baby, I really can't see
All this cheating you done to me
But you see
I still love you
'Cause I told you
You'll always be my boo
But I don't know
If I should leave you
'Cause my friends telling me
They told me
There're a lot of fishes out there
But leaving you
I just can't bear
I'm telling you
Why can't you hear?
So I gotta let you go
Right now and right here
'Cause to me
Life just ain't fair

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: We're sorry you're feeling so much pain over your love, Ngo, but pain is part of love, just as joy is part of it. We don't know what's going on with her, and maybe what you're hearing is true. But maybe it isn't true, and you should get her side of the story. You say that "there's a lot of fishes out there," and you're right. But you aren't out there, you're in here. So we hope you figure out a way, when you get out there, to stay out there because there are no fishes where you are, except those of the same sex!

A Part Of Me

I'm missing you
This shhh ain't really cool
Not having you
And can't even call you my boo
Just got me stressin'
Makes me ask myself a question
'Cause when I got chu in my life
It was a blessing
Now that you're out of my life
You got me wishin'
At night I shed tears
Wishing someone really cares
'Cause, baby girl, you're the only one
That I fear
'Cause for a G
You're the only one
Who could break my heart
It's like you're a part
Of me

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: You're experiencing the roller coaster emotions of love, but unfortunately, you allowed yourself to get locked up, so you're experiencing them from a lonely place. It sounds to us that maybe you both "cheated" on each other, and we're not just talking about cheating with another person. When your life as "a G" is more important to you than your life as a lover, you've made a choice to cheat love for the streets. Whether you're able to put this relationship back together or not (and for your sake, we hope you can), when you commit your love to another person, then it's time to put childish games behind you. In the long run, the G life can only lead to where you are, feeling what you're feeling. Time to make some changes...

College Bound

Man, I'm so ready to get on. I've been up here for eva. Well, at least it feel that way. I'm 'bout to go to Tennessee to look at these colleges. You can take D out ta ghetto, but you cain't take the ghetto out of D. Ha ha aaaa! Holla at cha boy.

-D Gutta LCRS

From The Beat: Well, you may not be able to take the ghetto out of the boy, but we're sure happy tha the boy is getting out of the ghetto! We hope when you're out in Tennessee, you stop doing the things that have brought you here, because you'll be risking your entire future if you don't, including whatever hopes you have of going to college! You've got it in your power to change your future. Go for it!

What Drew You To Crime?

I needed money so I went to go get quick money. But they caught me walking. I just wanted to go put some money in my pocket.

-NI GU

From The Beat: And the consequences of your wish for quick money included having no money at all! Becoming an adult means thinking about the consequences.

Just Doing It

Well, what drew me to crime
Was the feeling of just doing it
And not giving a damn
Watching ninjas slam
When we messing them up
So I'ma say it like this
I ain't blaming no one
'Cause I only got myself to blame
For this

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: Why do you think you didn't give a damn about what you were doing — and what could happen to you? Has that changed? Do you care about what happens to you now? Taking responsibility for your actions is a sign of maturity, Ngo, so we have great hopes that your experiences will make you want to change the way you live your life so you won't have to blame yourself in the future.

What Is It

W'at goes around
Comes around
And you know
What goes up
Must come down
You like that
So all you haters
Don't hate

-Squeak LCRS

From The Beat: Simple but excellent advice, Squeak. Basically, you're talking about karma. Hate generates more hate. That's the nature of karma. But then, love generates more love. So it's time to start loving yourself and balancing out all that hate

What's Your Problem?

My problem is committing crimes and coming in and out of juvenile hall.

-Tonisha GU

From The Beat: But what are the problems that lead you to commit those crimes? Do you have any choice in the matter?

Staying Out Late With The Boys

What drew me to crime is my ninja that I be hang with. But now I admit that some things that I did, like staying out late with the boys in the neighborhood.

-TeShawn LCRS

From The Beat: Well, you have a clear idea of what drew you to a life that led to lock-up. Now, what is going to draw you away from this life and into a life where you can live in freedom, make your money the legit way, go to school and prosper?

I Wish I Got Your Blessin'

Everything got me stressin'
Wishin' I got your blessin'
Gotta ask some questions
And then tell you my confessions
'Cause, baby girl, your love is all I got
When I'm without you
You always in my thoughts
Baby girl, I love you with all my heart
And I wish you'll never depart
I'll be your hubby
And you'll be my wife
Stay together forever
And mess around
And get hyphy

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: It's easy to understand why a young man, locked up with other young men, would think constantly about the love he left behind. But love is more than messing around and getting hyphy. It requires some responsibility and respect, not just for the other person and the relationship itself, but also for yourself. Do you respect yourself for how you live your life? Does she?

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over I will tell all my victim and their family I'm sorry taking whatever I took from them. Then take away all the pain I put my mom through and all those days my mom had to come up to my school to leave work for the dumb shhh I was doing for no reason. If I would did all them thing I named, I wouldn't be sitting in YGC passing out time.

-Tone B2

From The Beat: Saying sorry to your victims and to your mom is a wonderful place to start living in a different way, Tone. It seems like you have definitely learned from your mistakes, but it's your actions more than your words that will prove if that's true or not. We hope it is.

Burning In My Own Fire

Behind these walls
I'm burning in my own fire
I'm tired
But the judge says
I'm a liar
I must just get higher
If I'm such a liar
I must retire
Because I'm still
Burning in fire

-Michael LCRS

From The Beat: We feel the agony of hell you express so well in this short but tight poem, Michael. Can you understand why the judge would think you are a liar, even though we know you are not? We know you are caught in a world you can't control. But Michael, you can control yourself. You are not a little boy, but a young man. The system won't change. The streets won't change. The gangs won't change. The judge won't change. All of which leaves it entirely up to you. You have to be the one that changes, or you will continue to feel the heat. Is that fair? No. But is it real? Yes.

Victimized

I've been victimized by this system. Thinking it is all cool taking yo' freedom away for so long like that. The DA trying to play me, trying to really send me to YA. But most likely it will be the Ranch or deported to Nicaragua for one year. Man forget that. I need to be home. I need new food, new air, new clothes, I need to do this time and keep my life moving.

-Lil' Roach B4

From The Beat: If you really think about it, you are the victim of yourself and your actions. The system might be really playing you, but when it comes down to it, you are playing yourself. Your actions got you where you are today, not system. You might want to take a good long look at the way you're living and doing things. Maybe then you'll realize what you need to change — and with that change will come new food, new air, new clothes and a new life. By the way, we can think of worse things in the world than spending a year (or more) in Nicaragua.

Hatin' And Discriminatin'

Yeah, dis yo' boy, Ngo
Ha ha. Look, I can't stand it no more
People hatin' and discriminatin'
Just 'cause I ain't black
But, look, I ain't hatin' on my brothers
It look like y'all scared of them
Letting them do what they want
Just favoritizing them
So wassup wit' this?
I thought this supposed to be equal
But shhh ain't around here
Lucky I want to go home
'Cause if I didn't
I wouldn't know what I do
'Cause when I'm locked up
I don't act the same way
Look, right now I'm mad as hell
I can't really think
So I'm a say this
Forget y'all
I just don't give a damn

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: Oh yes, you do give a damn, Ngo, that's why it's so painful to feel isolated and put down. We're sorry you're feeling discriminated against, but we're glad you give a damn. It's that which will make you want to love yourself enough to do what it takes to stay out of places like this. If other people are hating on you because you're Vietnamese, that's their ignorance talking. You don't have to buy into it at all. In fact, you can feel sorry for them because they keep themselves from understanding the richness of everyone's culture, race and history. They are like a lot of Americans who prefer their comfortable ignorance. Don't fall into their trap by hating in return. We're glad you can use The Beat to get these frustrations off your chest.

Forget The Beat

Forget the Beat. I didn't get a page this time so I'm not writing shhh for y'all no more.

-Ngo

From The Beat: Well, since we just dropped a full page of your poems in 11.13, and since you have at least four other pieces in this issue, we're not really feeling very sorry for you.

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over I would not change the way I was living because the things that I been through have showed me the way of life and I started looking at things different. The only thing that make me wanna start over is that people keep telling to slow down because I'm moving to fast.

-Lil' AJ B2

From The Beat: Yeah, Lil' AJ you are moving too fast — and in the wrong direction. So slow down, take a good look at your surroundings and ask yourself if this is the life you want to live till you are old and winkled. You say you've started looking at things different. What things? How did you look at them before? How do you look at them now?

Once A Thug...

If I could start over I would change the fact that I let money control my life like I let it do. Man, I feel if it wasn't for money I would never be on probation. But at the same time if I could start over I would not change. I will never change being a thug.

-Y Boy B2

From The Beat: What makes you think that if you "never change being a thug," that the system will ever change in how it responds to you? You are deciding your own future by freezing yourself into the life you think you want, even though you know you don't want the consequences of that life. As you get older, the places they lock you up will also get older, and bigger and darker. Hey, the choice is yours, but it seems like you have already chosen.

Poems I'll Never Recite

I write things to express my feeling
Well, it just way better than killing
Like for me, I like to write
Writing poems I'll never recite
'Cause I think this shhhh is tight
'Cause me and my ninjas always like to fight
But fighting ain't the answer
So when are we going to wake up
And just admit we messed up?
'Cause it ain't too late to start over
'Cause we get judged like a book cover
Never read on what's inside
We human, too; we all cry

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: There is a lot of true wisdom in this tight poem, Ngo. Yes, we are all human, and we all cry. But even more important, as you say, it's never too late to redirect our lives so that we have less reason to cry and more reason to celebrate. It's in your power to make those changes. When you ask yourself the question you pose here — when we going to wake up — do you come up with any answers?

Money Is My Main Focus

I am all about money. Without money there ain't nothing. Money brightens my spirit, knowing that I don't have to depend on nobody but myself. I don't like asking people for things I want.

I want to do my own thing. I live my simple life making money how I want when I want. I haven't had money for a year. I've been up in ROP in San Andrea's. Now I am up in the hall 'cause I got terminated. Now I am going to ROP in Nevada for 18 months, so I ain't gonna have money for along time.

But as soon as get my stuff together I am gonna be making my money.

-Sleepy B2

From The Beat: What good does it do you to make money, if the way you make it only leads you to places like this or ROP where you can't spend it? You can make all the money you want and in all the ways you want, but if those ways are illegal, you gonna be back to step one and back to the same old place. Money can buy you things, but there are also things that money can't buy. You say that without money there ain't nothing. Does that mean the love of your family is nothing? Does it mean the pain you're feeling as you sit where you at right now — or the pain your mother feels because of it — is nothing? If you think about it, there's a lot of things you value that have nothing to do with money. Like freedom...

What's Up With It

I just mad right here because I'm still in here doin' nothing. My court just pass and the judge say that to come back April 4. But I had been here like two months and I can wait to get out because I miss my family and block.

-Mafioso B2

From The Beat: If you were to be sent home today Mafioso, what would you do differently to make sure you will not come back to the halls? Like we always say, getting out is the easy part. It's learning how to stay out that's hard.

If I Could Start Over

If I could wake up tomorrow start my life fresh, I would take it straight to school and get a job so I could make my future better. But that would be the only thing I would change. I love the life I live and who I turned out to be. The only thing in my life I would change is how serious I take school and how I get my money. But other than that, I'm cool.

-Jr B4

From The Beat: That should be good enough. By changing how you get your money, you might save your butt in the long run from making more mistakes and ending up in places where you don't want to be. As for taking school seriously, we believe it is the key to your cage...

Chump Change And More Time

W'at it do Beat? Man it feels good to be in SF. After doing 94 days in San Mateo I got to do some more time here, but at least I'm a step closer to going home. Times are tough and they only gonna get tougher, so keep yo' head up man.

I'm tired of this life. The shhhh I be doing only getting me chump change and more time. I ain't gone lie though, this life is hard to leave it. I ain't tripping though. I got to make the best out of bad situations, and only time will tell if where I get sent is a blessing or a curse.

-Sharky B2

From The Beat: Like you said, you have to make the best out of a bad situation. But it seems like scales may be falling from your eyes if you can see now that what you've been doing isn't worth it — "chump change and more time." Wherever they send you and wherever you go in life, as long as your mind is focused, you can achieve whatever you set our mind to. So, what have you set your mind to? What do you hope to get out of whatever program you have to do? 94 days in San Mateo is a big price to pay, so we hope you learn some things about yourself and about how to move forward without risking that kind of consequence again. Keep your head up and keep focused on the task at hand.

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over I would because I love my freedom. My life as been messed up in last three years from doing so much dirt. I wish I had never hit that lick. I miss my family. Now I got to go to Long Beach. I wish I could go home but now I got to do seven months to a year. Now when I get out this time I just got to work on not coming back.

-Carlos B2

From The Beat: Carlos, even though we can't turn back the hands of time, we can make some hard choices about the road we want to travel from this point forward. We all, as humans, make mistakes in life. The thing we have to do is learn from those mistakes and grow from them. If you don't want to go back to the same old lifestyle or be where you are in right now, decide what you want for your future, then get the help you need to move from point A (where you are) to point B (where you want to be).

Would I Start Over?

If I could start over would I? There's always been trouble coming my way ever since I was a lil' youngsta — with and without the gang. But I don't know if I would start over, even though since I started bangin' I started catching hella beef from every direction. Because if I started over, my life wouldn't be the same.

Even though there was bad times and I'm locked up, I wouldn't have the same friends and people that are in my life right now. With all the things I've experienced in my life till this date, I don't think I would start over. But I would think twice before I make a decision.

-Lazy B2

From The Beat: It seems to us that you are saying you wouldn't start everything all over again, but that there are some things or decisions you might want to change. What might those things be? We're sure you don't want to spend any more time being locked up, so what do you need to change in order to avoid that result?

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over I would go to school and take care of my girl more than I do now. Get a job and do my thang. Take care of my sis and my little bra and take them places they never been. And also take care of myself, like people say the temple within is the most thing I'm suppose to do. And try to pray a little more because it's better for the soul, my mom used to say.

-Big K B4

From The Beat: Will you do all these things you have just written once you get out? Are you ready for those changes? Do you want your sis and little bra to follow in your footsteps? They are looking to you for a path to follow. Think carefully about where you put your feet...

My Life Is Like Dead People

My life is like dead people walking down the street at night. I say that because my life is dead, but like, I'm still alive, but I'm still a dead man walking, in the long run. But I feel this way because I'm locked up in B1.

But my life is important to me now. When I talk to Jack in the Omega meeting, it made me feel good, an' I thank Jack an' all the people in the Omega meeting. Jack, he is a good man because he talk real all day. The way he talk make you think about all the mistakes you made, an' it made me want to change my ways.

-Man Man B1

From The Beat: You may feel like a dead man walking, Man Man, but you're very much a live man walking — and thinking. Yes, Jack always keeps it real, so it makes us happy to see that his words and Omega has made you think about your life and what you want from it. When you say you want to change your ways, why just "want" it? If you want to change, then do it. What are the things you want to change in your life? What will you actually change?

Always On My Toes

I'm in the system,
but I'm always on my toes.

They can take everything I got but not what I know
'Cause my knowledge is something they can't take away
Not even if they cracked my head open and looked at my brain
Just to let you know a powerful thing is your mind
and I'ma let them know they ain't gonna take mine.

-Pinguino B4

From The Beat: You are right, knowledge is something no one can take from you, but what good is knowledge when you don't put it to work? What do you know, and how can it help you stay out of places like this?

I'd Cheer You Up

I miss you, baby girl
And whenever you feel down
Remember there's someone
Who cares
Who's always around
You know me
I'm locked up right now
But if I wasn't
I'll be on the phone
Cheering you up
So, baby girl
Tell me, wassup?
I'm do this old school
Through the mail
Trying to cheer you up
Hoping I never fail
So, baby girl
I'm just showing you
That I care
'Cause I know life
Just ain't fair
And to let you now
Ngo loves you, ya hear?
So keep your head up
And be strong for me

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: While we think it's a very positive thing to have someone so special in your life, Ngo, we also think there are other things you have to focus on, especially if you want to keep that love thriving. As long as you're doing the things that let you be taken from her, you cannot take the strength that her love gives you. And she is left with only words to tell her how much you care. We believe your words, but words are so much easier than deeds. It's time to show how much you love her by putting that love above your love for the actions on the street that lead you here. When you get out, let love be the path to keep you out! In that way, you will cheer both of you up!

If I Was Able

If I was able to start over, I would never have flashed and went bad on my principal. I would not be here right now, heading to ROP or another group home. It got so bad that my mom don't even want me in her house, so I am going to try and do right this time.

But I don't know. Cats be hatin' on each other like they crab shhh — one crab trying to get out of the bucket and one of them pull him down. Two thumbs up!

-Money Earnin' Vernon B1

From The Beat: Why did you let it get so bad between you and your mother, Vernon? What can you do to restore the good relationship you had with her? What does it mean to you to "try and do right"? Why not just do right? What's the problem? There's an old myth about how, like crabs, whenever one person starts to do well, others try to sabotage him so he will fail and be back in trouble along with everyone else, like crabs boiling in stew. There may be some truth to this, but it seems to us like you are both the crab trying to crawl out of the bucket and the crab pulling yourself back down. Forget the other "crabs" and stop sabotaging yourself

You Brighten My Spirit

What brightens my spirit
Is thinking 'bout you, b
But the fear in it —

Thinking if I would ever see you again
To be how it was day after day, end to end
Thinking of you really helps
To keep me from stressing in this four-wall hell

I miss you, I'll remember you
I'll be home soon, don't worry
I'll call you

-Lil' Roach B4

From The Beat: Short, but very meaningful and to the point. Are you writing to a female, a family member, a homie?

Food Fight

I've been victimized by a group of young black men — teenagers — over something stupid. One day I was sitting at the bus stop, eating a nice, fine teriyaki chicken plate, an' about twelve boys hopped off the bus. One boy said, "That food smell good." Then he said, "Cuzzo, you gonna save me some of that?"

And it's all bad. I took one more bite of my food. Then one brother hit me in the jaw. Then I jumped over the back of the bus seat and put my back against the wall and started fighting back. I got lumped on my nose and had a black eye and a lumped lip, but they couldn't get me on the ground. But I ain't go out like a punk an' run, and that all that matters; I fought back.

'Til this day my eye still black. But I busted one dude lip when I punched him and kicked one dude and he fell on his butt. That day I never forget.

-Justin B1

From The Beat: What happened to the food? Did it spill all over the bus stop? We don't know what we would have done in this situation, but if we could have gotten away from that spot with our lunch still in our hands, we would have smiled and eaten well — and we wouldn't have thought of ourselves as punks. Is there any way to refuse to fight when challenged without looking like a punk? Do you think this fight was really about food, or was it about something else?

My New Life

I would start over a new life and move on and do something better, like go to school an' get a job and be myself and learn more stuff.

-DeMario B1

From The Beat: Terrific, De Mario! What makes this such a good little piece is that you can do all the things you wish you could do over... you can go to school, you can get a job, and you can always learn more stuff. Now, it's up to you to do it.

I Want To Be Something In Life

For my future I want to be something in life and get out of these streets and do something with my life. Go to college and get me a good degree. I want to be a nurse and a massage therapist or something, or maybe a lawyer.

I'm about to keep staying on the right path and leave the past and keep going forward 'cause I want to be somebody when I grow up. Not no broke female. I want to have something to show.

-Tasha GU

From The Beat: Maybe you could become a lawyer who gives her clients therapeutic massages... You'd be the most popular lawyer in the city! If you have the determination to finish school and go to college, there's really nothing that can hold you back. You will face temptations and challenges along the way, so how will you deal with them?

To Hustle Is Not Everything

If I could start my day over from the day I made my first mistake to get me put in the halls, the only thing I would change would be the people I did the crime with. That one thing could've been the thing that kept me from doing all the things that kept me coming in.

If this changed, I would not have hung out with the people who gave me that coke, to give me my second case, to continue my probation, only to have my case transferred to SF County. If that changed, I wouldn't have to stop going to school to hang out with people who showed me to hustle is everything. If that changed, I wouldn't be here for my third time, facing a case that might get me placed in a group home.

But then I come back to reality and know that I can't change that one thing, no matter how hard I tried.

-Ismael B1

From The Beat: You're right, Ismael, you can't alter the past, but you can learn from it to alter the future. We have no doubt that others influenced you to do the things that have led you here. But you have to face your own responsibility in being able to say yes to those things that are right and no to those things that are wrong. You have to set priorities that move your life forward in a positive way, like finishing your education and having the inner strength and courage to resist what you know should be resisted. Is that easy? No, but then, neither is being locked up...

I've Been A Victim

I've been a victim too many crimes. But if I could change my way to them, I would, 'cause some people don't get that chance to change their ways. But if I could, I would.

-DeMario B1

From The Beat: You say you would change if you could. So why can't you? What are you doing now that you think needs changing?

Issues

These streets is mean
I seen things ya ain't seen
I came from a place in Long Beach City
But out here is also mean

Kids out here is crazy
This community is also lazy
Sometimes I'd be thinking
About all the times I be sinking
Rottin' out here in this cell
Till I finally heard this bell

Before I woke up from that shell
The shell that was buried in my bone
Till I woke up and I was at my home

-Lil' Shotty B4

From The Beat: The most encouraging part of this tight poem are the words, "I woke up." You've got a lot on the ball, Lil' Shotty, and all of us are in need of people with brains and vision for something better. Let that shell buried in your bone be a constant reminder of how precious — and tenuous — life is so that you never take it for granted again.

Fresh Start

If I could wake up the next day and be rid of my negative parts of my life I would change my ways entirely. I would live my life the way my family and myself would want. I would go to school and complete everything I need to do to prevent my life from going down the same path.

I would use my experience to use as an alarm that goes off before doing anything that might affect my future. Me, I'm a kind of person that would learn my lesson especially going through this experience, so, I would try my best to keep myself away from the negativity and draw my homies to follow my own ways instead of living like them.

-Trace One B4

From The Beat: From all your writing, Trace, we feel confident that you have moved past the danger spot for you and into a new way of life. You don't have to think about what you "would" do. You can now concentrate on what you "will" do, which we hope includes all those things you and your family want for yourself.

Have You Ever Been A Victim?

No, I haven't! But if I was, I don't know what I would do. But I hope I would never be a victim, being that my friends and family would be very sad and unhappy.

-Xavier B1

From The Beat: Have you ever made someone else a victim? If so, how do you think their friends and family felt? Is there a way to avoid being either a victim or a victimizer?

I Would Change My Life

If I could start all over I would not do what I do now. I would change my life so that everyone will be proud of me. And that I wouldn't end up the way I did, like being in here in YGC.

The way I would change my life is I would have stayed in my house and stayed in school and not be on the streets trying to make the easy money. I would get good grades in school and get a job so that way I could have money to buy clothes and shoes. And the most important person I would change for is my little girl and my family because I care about them so much. I would do anything to make them happy.

-Criminal B4

From The Beat: If you would do anything to make your family happy (and to give your little girl the father she deserves), it's well within your power to make the changes you say you want to make. You will get out of here, Criminal, and then you'll have to decide if this is just empty words, or a real desire to change. We want to urge you to focus in on that one truly important foundation for a better future, and that is going to school and taking it seriously. You can be the son your family wants, the father your child needs, and the person you see yourself becoming.

Go To School

If I can start over I would go and get a job so I can have a nice home with my baby girl. Man I would go to school.

-Anthony B4

From The Beat: Do it — especially the part about going to school! We are hoping that you are keeping it real with yourself since you're the only one who will be cheated if you are just talking the talk but not walking the walk.

You Don't Want It

I have been a victim before. I have been shot at an' it's not the thing to do. If you don't wanna have to stay away from certain streets, bus lines, and even schools, you don't want this life I'm livin'. You feel me? Me an' my dawgs are some kinda animals...

-Woody B4

From The Beat: So then, it must be that you like having to stay away from certain streets, bus lines and schools. It seems strange to us to voluntarily limit your freedom of travel and association. So we're taking your advice to avoid getting shot at, etc. Too bad you aren't ready to apply this wisdom to your own life.

Never A Victim

Nope, I have never been a victim, I was in here for selling brass knuckles and bb guns over the internet. I have never been in trouble before, and go to school every day. I take AP and honor classes. I hope I get out soon and study for my AP exams in May.

If I could start over I wouldn't meet that guy up for a purchase. I would have just mailed it to him.

-Sean B4

From The Beat: So in other words, if you could do it all over again, you would do the same thing, only this time you'd add the charge of "mail fraud" to your crimes? It's great that you're such a serious and good student, Sean, but selling brass knuckles and BB guns isn't something we like to see you justify, however you do it.

Untitled

My name is M Beezy. Now if I want to keep doing what I'm doing, then it's my life. I don't see why the PO's always trying to hate on me an' send a gangsta like me down the highway for some straight bullshh. But the judge only see you in front of him an' sometimes you don't even get to talk. For my opinion I would suggest that the judge come an' visit some kids who write letters to her an' sit down an' talk to them. But until then you can find me on the block thuggin' it.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: You're right, MB. It's your life, and if you want to keep doing what you're doing, then that's what you'll do. But of course, part of what you're doing is spending chunks of your time under the thumb of strangers, wearing used drawes, showering with other boys, and doing what you're told to do. And the more you keep doing what you've been doing out there, the more time you can expect to spend doing what you do in here. So as long as you factor in the consequences of doing what you want to keep doing — because you can't escape them — then keep doing it!

Starting Over

If I could start all over I wouldn't change shhh — same projects, same places, still getting dough, still doing whatever to get it, still holding down, still got that blappa wherever I'm at. Where I'm from you got to get it. If you don't eat you might as well be dead meat. Because the squad do whatever to get that dough...

-D Wig B4

From The Beat: "Still getting dough, still doing whatever to get it, still holding down, still got that blappa..." and still in jail. Need we say more?

What Brightens My Spirit

Things that brightens my spirit is my mom, most likely people who got love for me and I got love for them. That's what makes my spirit brighten.

-Goo B B2

From The Beat: Does getting a phone call in the hall brighten your day? What do you do to brighten your mom's spirit?

No Dreads

I don't have dreads in my head
So when I go dumb I jingle my singles...

-Joann GU

From The Beat: Now that's what you call being creative and setting your own trend. This poem reads almost like a Haiku.

Getting Out Would Brighten My Spirits

What would brighten my spirit right now? That would be getting out of here, putting my own clothes and shoes on. But when I'm out chillin' with my girlfriend always brightens my spirit every day to know that I have somebody with me all the time that loves, and cares for me, somebody I can talk to about anything. Not to say that I don't have a family that doesn't, but someone that's my best friend, and love.

-Tae B4

From The Beat: You are very fortunate to have a loving soul mate as well as a supportive family. With that kind of help, you should be able to find a way to stay out of places like this. Next time you're out, remember that it is what you do that shows your love, and not what you say. So put your girlfriend and your family above of those things you also like but which take you from those you love. Feel us?

Changing My Personality And Attitude

If I could start over, I would change all the things I've done in the past and just change my whole personality and my attitude, because I know that I have done something that I would probably regret, but I hope not. My attitude now is changing as I get older, and my personality is just the same. I am getting more macho as I get older. But when I get out, I hope I can change, but I will still be on my block for life.

-Xavier B1

From The Beat: Well, Xavier, at your young age you can't possibly know what you will be doing for life. Even at our advanced age, we can't predict what will happen in our lives. We know things change all the time. You say you are becoming more macho. Do you think that will help you stay free? Does it matter to you? If you don't want to be a long-term slave in a prison system, then we hope you can find a way to do something different with your life. We know far too many people doing long years in prison who waited just a bit too long to make that change...

You Pick

Wa's up Beat? It yo' boy Young B up in here wit' some shhh to tell you. First, let me start by saying people is stupid. It this dude up in here fighting people to become a gang banger. Like today, this dude took off on another kid and made him hit the ground so hard it look like someone shot him. So now the dude is 18 and he going to 850. I'm just letting you know that so you can think before you go there.

850 is not all about getting bail out. So if you don't know, if you are on probation you will have to stay there until you get off. So if you think you can get bail out, think about what I said. Stay up.

-Young B B5

From The Beat: The real tragedy about what you describe is that the one who started the fight is far from stupid! Actually, he's smart. He's just not smart enough to escape what seems so important to the young, but which gets less and less important as you mature. For all the progress this young man has made over the years, he is still willing to jeopardize his future just to be a part of something that he thinks is bigger and better than he is by himself. In the long run, it is a very self-destructive path.

My Best Friends

Man, my best friends is my little brother. LG Banga and Art Cash. When I needed them, they were there for me. And when they needed me, I was there for them. They treated me like a big brotha and I treated them like my little brothers. Anything they needed, I had it for them. Everywhere I go they go. Holla at yo' boy Fat T.

-Fat T B5

From The Beat: Real friends are hard to come across, Fat Thug, so try not to take the relationship you guys share for granted. Of course, as long as you allow yourself to get taken from them and locked up, you can't be there for them when they need you. Respect these friendships when you get out so you don't risk losing them.

I Was A Kidnap Victim

When I was walking home one night, these guys drove up next to me in a big van and kidnapped me. They was telling me I had to stop messing with this guy I was messing with at the time, or they was gone "beat my ass." But I kept saying no, so they whoop my ass. Then finally, after two days they realized I wasn't gone stop messing with him, so they let me go.

-Princess GU

From The Beat: This sounds like a very frightening experience. Did you tell anyone? Did you report it to the police? Are you still with the same guy that you risked so much for?

Get Out And Do Me

What's good? Me up in this YGC thing mad as hell. Just cannot wait to get out to go do my thing. Because it's not the same thing without my ninjas, and shhh not too good because I miss being with my ninjas and being in the 'hood. And I know my ninjas miss me. And now me and my ninjas locked down in this shell and now I cannot do me. Why this got to be? I just want to get out and do me.

-Young Hitta GU

From The Beat: Isn't doing "your thing" or "doing you" with your ninjas what got you here to begin with? If all you can think about is going back to the same block, the same homies and the same act, you can bet money that the system will react the same, too. And each time you fall into this hole, it gets deeper and harder to crawl out of. All we're saying is that if you're not going to change, don't expect the consequences to change, either.

Have You Ever Been A Victim

What it do Beat? Y'all know this ya boy, M Beezy F Baby, please say the baby. I have been a victim of a slug that wasn't meant to end up in my body but it did, an' it made me go crazy. Now I find myself locked up thuggin' out on my block. You know where that be till the day I die.

But now I really want to move on with my life I want to have a nice house some place out of state, an' have one child. (Beat, don't talk about my child...) Nah, just playing. but that's it. M Beezy out. Think fast.

-M Beezy B4

From The Beat: Don't you know when you tell someone "Don't talk about" whatever, then that's the thing they want to talk about? But we won't talk about your child — except the one that's still living inside you, the one that slug could have put an end to. Time for a change, MB. Don't you agree?

Have You Ever Been A Victim

One day I was going to eat at Wendy's and some people where talking shhh outside. So I went to see what's up with them. They didn't say anything. A couple minutes later a couple Tongans came runnin' up. One came up to me ask me if I was from some place and he just cracked me. I fell down and like six just mopped me up after they stopped hittin' me. I jumped up and just chilled in Wendy's.

They all left. The cops came, took me in and they told me they were gonna do something. They didn't do anything.

-Walter B4

From The Beat: Was this fight gang related? When you say you went to see what was up with them, how did you do that? Did you challenge them? What kind of shhh were they talking? Can you imagine any other way you could have handled this situation to avoid getting beat up? Have you ever done the same to another person? If so, do you think that it was karma bringing the past back to you?

My Baby Girl

I would change my life for my baby girl so my baby girl can have a good dad, so my girl can follow my good footstep, so she can have a good life too. I do not want my girl to end up like me. I really want to get out of YGC so I can see my baby girl.

-Anthony B4

From The Beat: We hope your love for your baby can change the direction you've been traveling so that you can be the father she needs. But tell us, why do you love and respect your own child enough to change your life, but you apparently don't love and respect your mother's child enough to do the same? (Also, Anthony, we would like you to choose just a single topic and write more about it than just a couple of sentences.)

What Brighten My Spirit

Seeing my crimies ball an' riding for the cause while the rest of the hatas fall to the point of no return. Getting money, stackin' chips, getting rich, havin' sex, drinkin', smoking getting' high to the highest degree, then start over because when I'm gone that's the memory of me.

Until next time we meet this is the sound of the beat. 1,000. (Even though every piece I write to The Beat they always erase 1,000 off the end of The Beat, they shouldn't because the word thousand comes from a real ninja that ends his conversation to let you know what it do. So I say that to let the listeners (readers) know the convo is real but I also over know what I'm talkin' about.)

-Chill Will B5

From The Beat: With your explanation, we allowed the 1,000 in your piece. But when you say you know what you're talkin' about, we're not so sure. There are things you can't yet know simply because you haven't had the experience to learn from. You know some pretty minor consequences, and have only heard of the much more serious ones waiting for you down the road. Those are the ones we hope you don't have to learn about the hard way. What cause are you riding for? Is drinking and smoking over and over again a so-called cause worth even mentioning? If you take the time to consider all the causes worth riding for, you will realize that you are only wasting your time riding for things that will get you nowhere other than where you are at now — stuck and at a standstill!



Victimized By A Hit-And-Run Driver

I was victimized on June 23, 2004 by a hit-and-run driver. I was walking in the cross walk at Balboa Park when a white four door Subaru car was driving down the third turning lane. As the light was turning red she tried to make the light. While I'm passing the third lane, I feel myself flying up in the air. As I'm coming down her car hit me again. This time I flew over the dividers and landed in the middle of street, on the side where the cars are coming up the hill from Geneva and Mission there.

I waited for the ambulance to arrive. It happened that a lot of people were at the scene. A group of people got her license plate number.

The victim of crime office did follow up. I had to go to 850 Bryant to look through photos to see if I recognized her face, but none of the photos was her. Luckily she ended up getting notified and she confessed to what she had done. She and my mom were attending mediation meetings. And that's how I was victimized.

-Ebony GU

From The Beat: What a frightening experience! You're so lucky that you weren't killed! Did you break any bones? What happened at the mediation sessions? What consequences did the driver have to face? You may have been victimized at the time, but you dealt with everything like a true survivor.

I Would Do Everything Different

If I could wake up one morning and start over I would take the advantage of it. I would do everything different 'cause I been through so many crazy shhh. There would be some things I keep the same and I'll do a lot of things different. I'll change all of my ways, I do know, and not do them ever again.

-Princess GU

From The Beat: What are the things that you would keep the same, and what would you change? Of course, you will have a chance to change things when you walk out of here. What will be different? You've pulled us in with your piece, now we want to hear more!

Nothing Brightens My Spirit

Nothing really brightens my spirit because I be stressed out a lot, and it's really hard for me. Nothing, or maybe sometimes it brighten my spirit and hopes.

-Niota GU

From The Beat: We're sorry things look so gray for you Niota, but that's probably because you're locked up. When you get to breathe fresh air and make your own (better) decisions, we think you're going to feel better.

Fighting And Doing Time

My name Fat T. I been locked up for a year. Man, it is hard for been locked up for a long time. I'm in maximum security because I was fighting every day. When I was out, I was making \$500 a day. Holla at yo' boy Fat T.

-Fat T B5

From The Beat: Yes, being locked up is hard on everyone. So how can you learn to control yourself so that you're not fighting every day? There so many other things you can be doing with your time and energy. You should enroll in school and improve your reading skills. Reading is so important to your future. Making \$500 a day didn't keep you from losing your freedom and having to wear someone else's torn drawes. There are things worth more than money. We hope you spend some time on the outs working on those things, and not just "having fun."

If I Could

If I could start over I would change my life by not fighting and going to school every day. And not going to jail. But now when I get out, please believe that I won't come back to jail because it is not the place to be for me.

-Blanca GU

From The Beat: So, in a way, you will be starting over fresh, and this time with some experience and knowledge under your belt. If you follow through on your promise — go to school and no fighting — you'll be giving yourself the new start you need to stay out of the system. We hope you never come back, Blanca, because you're right, this is not the place for you to be.

No Record, No Enemies, No Mess

If I could wake up tomorrow and start my life fresh — no record, no enemies, no mess from my past to live down — I would take advantage of the lessons I've learned and let these lessons lead me to walk an entirely different path.

I would change the way I'm living and try to make my mother proud by getting released from Camp, avoiding the streets, going to school, and getting a job so I can help my parents (instead of hurting them).

-Jeff

From The Beat: We know that still having a record, enemies and a mess from the past to live down, makes life harder for you, but you know that you can still do exactly what you say you would do if you could have a fresh start. The fresh start that really counts the most is the one in your heart — then having the will power and commitment to do your part.

Mommy Brightens My Spirits

My mommy brightens up my spirits because she always knows what to say or do to brighten up my day. She always been there for me and when she comes to see me I get really happy.

-Princess GU

From The Beat: We are glad that your mommy is there for you, Princess. But why aren't you there for her? It seems like getting out of here and staying out of here would be the best way to say thank you for all she's done for you.

I Love You, But You Hurt Me

I'ma love you till my dying day

And for you I'll always pray

You're my heart my soul, my everything

And with you I'll always hang

I loved you for who you are and not how you look

But I still don't understand why my heart you took

What was it about me to make you leave?

Is it because I wouldn't give you no space and you couldn't breathe?

Is it because you have a habit and I don't?

Is it because...??

Well I don't know what else to say

But I hope you can think about what I just said

I wish I could forget about you

But there is little thing that gets you back in my head

Well, yeah that's it...

-Joann GU

From The Beat: Joann, your pieces about loving a person addicted to drugs are painful and important. Relationships are difficult for everyone, young and old, so trying to make a go of it with someone who loves a chemical more than he loves you (because addiction is a kind of sick love) makes a successful relationship almost impossible. Maybe, if he faces his own problems (which you cannot face for him), he will get himself together and realize what he's lost in you.

So Much On My Mind

I am so irritated because I have so much on my mind... I'm supposed to get out but I'm getting played. Now I wanna go home, but my grandma don't want me home. Well yeah that's it... a shout out to my cousins, and brother, my uncle, and the rest of my street... well yeah I'm out.

-Joann GU

From The Beat: It seems like almost everybody locked up in these halls is "getting played" by the system. Yet, without you giving the system power over your life, they couldn't be playing you. So, we hope you focus a little of that irritation on yourself for playing yourself to begin with — and, more important, so that you don't play yourself again! What is your plan once you do get out, Joann? What will be different this time?

If You Could Start Fresh

If you could wake up tomorrow and start your life fresh how would it be? If I could, I will stay out of trouble, take my life an' my family seriously. I wouldn't be around the people that will take my life to an end. I will be in a hole 'nother part of the world. I would keep myself out of here. I will be somewhere working, getting some money for my family.

-Isaac B4

From The Beat: Well, you're in luck, because you do have a chance to start life fresh. Take the day that you are set free as a starting point to break free from all the things that are holding you back. Stop hanging with those people that help to get you in trouble, respect the love and support your family has given you, go to school — and stay out of here!

I Was A Victim

I was a victim when I was like 12 years old. What happened was I almost got raped by my grandmother's boyfriend. He came in my room — it was like at 12 in the morning — and he told me if I don't tell he would give me 10 dollars. I said "no," so I got up and ran downstairs and told my stepmother.

I was crying really bad and my stepmother was like, "What's wrong?" I said he trying to put his hands down my pants, and she ran upstairs with her boyfriend and they beat him up. Then they called the police and he went to jail.

-Blanca GU

From The Beat: You were really brave to run downstairs and tell your stepmother right away. How do you think this experience has affected you? Did this affect your relationship with your grandmother?

Should Have Stayed Home

If I was to start over, I would've went in the house and I wouldn't've been in here.

-Jimmy B1

From The Beat: It seems so simple after it happens, doesn't it, Jimmy? If you'd only stayed home. But isn't the real challenge to say no to whatever comes along and tempts you to mess up? No one can hide in the house forever. You have to learn to carry your protection around in your head.

Can't Wait

What's up homies. Me here, kickin' it with my homies in juvenile hall. I went to court today and the judge is sending me back to a group home. I just came out of one and graduated, for the first time. But it's OK. I can take this.

It's been nine months since I've been here. But I got caught doing something stupid. And the first time I came out of my room, I did another something stupid. So I got changed to another unit. Now I'm just trying to stay out of trouble, because if I do get in trouble, I'll get sent to ranch.

Whatever happens, happens. I don't know the future, but when I get out I'm going to try to stay out of trouble. But I've always said that. This time I'm going to try my best.

To all reading this – keep your heads up and try to stay out. I can't wait to go to my hometown, Watsonville.

-Francisco

From The Beat: We're not so sure about that "whatever happens, happens" stuff. That implies that we have no control over the future. And clearly, we do have some control. Doing stupid things gets you locked up. You can count on that. Because here you are. But if you don't do dumb things, then you don't wind up in the can. We think it really is up to you on matters like this. So, get smart, stay smart. Take charge of your life.

Trading Freedom

Growing up in the streets, juvy was nothing. It was the same thing as just kicking it with the homeboys on the streets, 'cause I had homeboys on the ins and homeboys on the outs. So it's the same thing to me, 'cause I'm still with my raza.

-W

From The Beat: We can see how it may have felt the same, trading one difficult environment for another, but with the cast of characters unchanged. But we know you know that freedom is better than incarceration. And we hope you know that there are people who will help you. Plus, we also know that being in the hall doesn't compare to being in state prison, even if you do have homeys there. You may think it's the same, but that's a thought you'll come to regret. Ask an adult you trust for the help you need. You can have a better life than you imagined.

Your Voice

Your voice makes me feel secure.

Your touch... softer than velvet.

Your kiss... sweeter than honey.

Your face... prettier than a rose garden.

When you are near me my heart beats faster

than that of a hummingbird.

When you are away from me

I feel a sliver in my heart.

-Anibal

From The Beat: Anibal, are you talking to us? We had no idea you cared so much. Just kidding. We know your sweetheart will like this one.

My Name Is...

My name is Kyle and I'm 15 and back in the hall looking at the same walls. I'll be here for awhile and then I'll go to a rehab for a while. I hope I can stay clean. If not, I'll be going to a foster home for from six to eight months. But I'm going to try.

-Kyle

From The Beat: Staying clean may be a hard job, but it can be done. We're sure you've already been told this, but sobriety is a day-to-day accomplishment. If you approach it that way, you can do it, too. Most good things in life require hard work and persistence. Good luck to you Kyle.

To All

To all locked up – think about your jaina (girlfriend) because life is like a clock. Your life

esta en un hilo ahora vives y no

sabes cuando vas a morir

(Is in a string

Now you're alive and you

Don't know when you're going to die

uno vive la vida (One lives life) minutes horas (hours)

and

seconds and all the homeboys

who are down for their shhhh

help it trucha carnales (Y'all be careful bros) and take

care of your jaina like the life

don't let nadie (anyone) put you down

alrato (I'll holla at y'all later)

keep your head up.

-B Boy

From The Beat: We think we caught most of this. You're saying that if you care about the important things in your life, prove it by not acting dumb, but it sounds to us like you have your priorities all wrong, when you talk about the homies who are down. Down for what? Down for prison? Down for taking out their own people? IF one is down, then how does one take care of his lady??

Things Drew Me To Crime

What drew me to crime was to have the things I wanted. I got them illegally. I'd get alcohol with the money so I could get drunk and get cigarettes, and lighters. Then when I'd get with my friends it would be worse because we would all get stoned and drink and do stupid stuff.

-Julian

From The Beat: And here you are. What will you do differently when you get out?

As If

I'm untouchable, as if I were a flame.

The only thing that brings me down is the rain.

I'm quiet like a hummingbird.

I'm not making this up. That's my word.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Hey, why remain anonymous. This is a cool poem. Nice work. If the rain is the only thing that brings you down, you must be pretty far down by now. We're all waiting for the sun to break through...

When

When I get out of the hall, I plan on taking responsibility. I will succeed. I will go so high I will kiss the sky, literally. By this time I will be off probation and have a crib of my own. I will have a business for myself, and run it. I'll buy myself a Rolex and top it off with my grill. Anyway, I'll look for new ways to improve myself.

-Jeff

From The Beat: We hope you do just that — improve yourself, that is. We wonder what kind of business you intend to run. To succeed in business you must work very hard. Are you ready for that? The foundation for all your dreams is a decent education. Have you finished yours?

Back Here

I am back here, locked up. I've gone a long time without talking to you guys. But it's all right. With God's help, I am going to be out and doing the right things.

What can I say? I did a lot of things wrong and I lost my freedom. I thought everything would be easy for me in this life, but I chose the wrong thing at the wrong place. Alrato, homeboys.

-Federico

From The Beat: Very philosophical. We like that you're accepting responsibility for your behavior. The hardest thing, sometimes, is to stop and consider the consequences of what you are about to do. We all have gotten in trouble when we forgot that lesson. Remember that God helps those that help themselves, so what are you going to do to help yourself?

A Good Day

What's up Beat! Well, today's been a good day. Yesterday was even better because I got a letter from a "special" somebody. I was hella surprised and happy.

Only fifteen days left. I'm so excited. Anyways, that was my checkup. Now I'm checking out. Much love.

-Jessica

From The Beat: We are very happy for you Jessica. It's been a long haul. Good luck.

My Sister's B-Day

Today is my sister's birthday and I'm locked up. It's kinda crappy. I feel real bad that I can't be there for it. If you've been locked up on a sibling's birthday, you know how I feel. It's really messed up.

-Lil' Mikey

From The Beat: How old is your sister now? It seems like any special occasion is hard to miss while you're locked up. In fact, it's messed up to be locked up on any day! What are you going to do when you touch down to make sure that you are there for every birthday she has from now on?

My Freedom

I lost my freedom and it didn't make sense. I never took away anyone else's freedom, so what gives others the right to take mine. This is bullcrap.

-Noah

From The Beat: You seem to be operating under a narrower conception of the law than the law appreciates. Do you think that whatever it was you did should be done back to you (or to one of your family members)? Would that be fair? What should they do instead of taking your freedom?

Caught Up

I got caught up. Blah, blah, blah.

My head is a very sick and twisted place.

You don't want to enter. Trust me!

-Shayna

From The Beat: Well, let a bit more out of your head, and it will be a more comfortable place to be. Let a little of that dark out, and let a little light in. You can let some of it out right here.

Better Days

Hey Beat! Today has been a mellow day for me. I've been thinking about my dad a lot lately. Right now he's in prison, in Salinas. He's got three strikes and I don't think he's getting out.

I miss my dad a lot. I'm trying not to dwell on it though. The only thing I am looking forward to is going home to my family. Until then I'll just be praying for better days. One love, one heart Beat...

-Jessica

From The Beat: We're sorry for your loss Jessica. Do you write to your dad? We're pretty sure he'd like to know that you're doing better than he is. And to tell him that honestly, you have to be actually doing better. We know that you are a bright person. You have plenty of examples about how not to lead your life. Learn from those examples, please, so that we don't have to see you in here again.

What I'm Going To Do

Dear Beat Within:

I'm going to a group home to complete my program so I can spend time with my family.

I want to get a job working as a landscaper. I'll be raking the tree leaves and planting flowers. That's about it, Beat.

-Ricky

From The Beat: Those sound like very realistic goals. It sounds very peaceful and productive to think of you landscaping. What steps do you need to take to get that job working as a landscaper? We hope you get a solid education in the basics, because that will prepare you for many, many things in life.

Losing Freedom

I think that nothing is worth losing your freedom for. Nothing is better than being on the outs with your loved ones. I've been locked up many times in my vida loco. I know that every time I get locked up I think about what I would be doing on the outs today.

Always think twice before doing something that might cost you your freedom. Nothing is worth losing your freedom. Peace out. This is my last week in the hall. Take care.

-Martin

From The Beat: "Think twice." That's good advice Martin. Be sure to follow it. Since this is your last week, you should tell us what you're going to do when you get out. What's the first thing you'll do once you hit freedom?

Staring

I sit and stare at my wall thinking what am I going to do when I get out of the hall. Maybe go to the mall?

Or on a vacation? Who knows? As long as we are together,

I say: whatever's clever.

And I also never want to go to a place where you have to put on a face and fend off your enemies.

So when I get out, I'm going to live life free.

-Anibal

From The Beat: By this time you know that everything has a price, of sorts, including freedom. We have a feeling you're willing to pay the price for it. And who's the 'we' in "we are together?" We wish you the best.

Nothing's Worth....

Nothing's worth losing my freedom! When I commit crimes, I just hope I don't get caught. Now that I'm in here and facing serious charges I realize that doing those crimes and hoping not to get caught was really stupid. I wish I could take it back, but I can't. Nothing is worth my freedom.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Maybe it wasn't stupidity. Maybe it was immaturity. Or maybe there's no difference... Now that you know nothing is worth losing your freedom, what do you plan to do differently when you get out of here?

Starting Over

If I could wake up tomorrow, fresh, I would move away & get married, have kids, live good, go on vacations, relax and enjoy life.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Sounds like The American Dream. Why don't you give it a try.

Always
think twice
before doing
something

Walden House PSK

Stronger Now

See, you Know we were cool at first. But then you started to call me names, "slut" and "ho'e." I never knew that you could hurt me so bad. I thought that you would stop, but it never did.

See, I love you and I thought you loved me, but it never felt like that. So you kept calling me names and it hurt me and made me feel bad 'cause you were my boyfriend.

But now those words don't hurt me, and I can now say, "No," and "It's over."

-B-Eyes

From The Beat: This piece ends better than it begins... We always wonder why boys think they can call girls any kind of name they want and expect that girl to stay with them. You're worth much more than the disrespect he showed you. Always remember to respect yourself so you never have to put up with that kind of immaturity and bad behavior again.

What Brightens My Spirit

What brightens up my day is, one, being with my mom and, another, is being with my boyfriend. What also usually brightens up my day is candy and food.

-Theresa

From The Beat: What kind of candy do you like? What specific foods brighten your day?

No

What up Beat? To say the truth, I don't have anything to say today because I have by my mind on going home on Thursday the 30th of March.

-Los Tejenitas

From The Beat: By the time this Beat comes out you'll be home! That's so great. Now, just do what you know you have to do to stay there.

Pain In The Neck

I have a crick in my neck and I'm hella irritated. I've been trying to lean the opposite way the entire day, but enough is enough. Shhh! Looking at people side ways is getting kinda boring. Okay y'all are 'bout to leave so I'll close.

-Slug

From The Beat: So, what you're saying is that The Beat gives you a pain in the neck? Maybe you just slept the wrong way. Is it all right now?



What Makes Me Smile

Who brightens my day? Well there is more than one person. Well the first person is my Mom. She is a beautiful, unique woman. No one could ever replace her. My big sister Pooka makes my day 'cause she go dumb. I got so much respect for her for the simple fact that we putting Hayward on the map. We two tight female rappers from Hayward. If you see it, don't hate Lil' Zillah (me) and Pooka. We go.

Ree, he my big cousin. He from Hayward too. Man, he put me up on everything. I know he a legend. He put me up on this rappin' shhh I'm doing now. Ree, I love you so much.

But also my best friend Lil' Mookie. Man, that's my ninja, real talk. But always know that I love you and always will be wit' chu. I love you Britoria, real talk.

-Lil' Zillah

From The Beat: It seems like you got plenty of people in your corner, Lil' Zillah. When you finish your program and get back together with them, we hope they can help you avoid the temptations that bring you down... Are you and Pooka planning to record any of your raps?

My Bright Light

The person that brightens my day is my sister (Leila). She passed away Jan. 12, 2006. She brought me up when I was down. There was a lot of I people that brightens my day but she brightens my day all the time. She brings me up when I was down, depressed, or lost. She was always putting me in my place when I need to be. But even though she ain't hea, she will always brighten my day no mater what. And no one will ever replace her. She is not here physically, but she will always be here spiritually.

-Makineti

From The Beat: This is a sweet but sad tribute to a true sister. You're right, her spirit continues to live, and it will always brighten you for as long as you continue to live.

My daughter Brightens My Spirit

My daughter brightens my day. Every day I think and say to myself why am I still here at PSK. All the stuff I have been through, and the hardest one was the last day that I see my daughter was on Nov. 3, 2005. I don't know how I handled my situation that day. I wish that I could have visit with her still today but I can't and I have to leave it at that.

-Los Tejenitas

From The Beat: We hope that the love you have for your daughter can help lift you out of the trap you've been in. In other words, we hope the love for your daughter will overcome the love for drugs that keep your life in such turmoil.

Missing My Sister

My sister brightens my spirit. Well not right now 'cause the place she's at won't let me talk to her or write. Well, I did write but they are hella strict and my letter's deemed "Inappropriate." I'm not trippin' though 'cause I'm gonna write a very boring letter. But I'm gonna write her 'cause I love her. We always had a bad-ass time with her. I can't describe it. We just have bloody grand trips anywhere anytime. Just being with her makes me happy. She's my roaddawg. Ya hear that Hobbitt?

-Slug

From The Beat: Well, it must be painful not to be allowed to communicate with someone as close to you as your sister. What do you need to do to change that situation? When will you be able to contact her again? Will you be together when you leave PSK?

I Regret

One of the things I regret doing is bringing a knife to school. I also regret leaving school early and lettin' da boys check me. I also regret hangin' out with the people I did in the tenth grade. When I was in tenth grade, I hung out with eleventh graders. When I hung out wit' them, I got in all kinds of trouble with the laws and have many enemies all over Marin, Mill Valley, San Rafael, and lots of other places.

-Matt
From The Beat: Part of growing up is finding the strength to say no to trouble, no matter who is encouraging you to mess up, Matt, whether it's your older homeboys, family, cops, country, etc. Are you learning to listen to that inner voice when it cautions you that what's about to go down won't be 'nothin' nice? If you're trusting your best instincts, you can lead a productive life that will keep you happy and proud.

Do You Go

Do yo go?
Do you know what "go" mean?
If you go

Then you raw
I'm about to tell you what "go" mean
"Go," mean you go stupid and the whole nine yards

And you know what I'm talkin' about

-Dame
From The Beat: You know many of your readers don't know street talk, so why don't you explain what "go" or "go stupid" means?

My Nickname

They call me Spooky because I like to spook some people. The older homies call me that because I put in work for my 'hood.

-Spooky
From The Beat: Putting in work for your 'hood is exactly what's put your body in the hands of strangers to tell you when to sleep, eat and go to the bathroom! Spooking people sounds like it could be fun (depending on how you do it), but there's nothing fun about being in a place like this. So we hope you reconsider the definition of "work" when you get out of here. Otherwise, we'll be seeing you again...

Jacked By A 7/11 Guy

When I got jacked by a 7/11 guy, I gave him a \$5 bill and he gave me a one dollar back, when I only buy a Coca Cola that is worth \$1.50. He should of gave me \$3.50 back.

-Forgot To Sign
From The Beat: Did you tell him about his mistake? What did he say? Do you think he meant to cheat you, or was it an honest mistake? When did you notice it?

Gangs Are Bad Lil' Kids!

One time when was in Vegas on the run, I was dressed in all one color, with some shorts and a shirt that said, "Las Vegas" on it, and me and my (ex) boyfriend threw up a sign. Well, he did, 'cause he's in a gang, and they took out they guns and wanted to shoot us. But I ran out of the street.... Shhh.

-Melissa
From The Beat: We had to take out your gang colors, Melissa. To be shot at, while you're on vacation, by strangers, simply because they belong to an enemy gang, is not only scary, it's downright stupid. Do you think it's worth being in a gang? How did your boyfriend and you get away? Did this experience change anything about the way you live your life?

The Worst Teacher Ever

When I was in third grade, I moved from Lyonwood to Olive, so when I went to Olive there was a mean gym teacher. She was hella mean. She got me held back. So I had to do third grade back.

-Santiago
From The Beat: It can really hurt and be embarrassing to be held back a grade, Santiago. Can you somehow make up that grade, maybe take a gym class in the summertime, and catch up? Have you honestly asked yourself what you did or didn't do during the school year to be held back? If you truly don't understand why your teacher kept you back, why don't you go ask her?

I Prayed For A Sign

I opened up my eyes
And prayed for a sign
I said, "If there's any way you can hear my prayers
If there's anything or anyone out there, listening

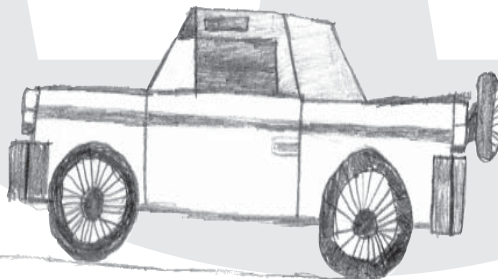
Please let me know my any means."
My prayers for the impossible were answered
And I got a sign
So now I'm blessed with faith
How could I hate God and life
No matter what is fine?

-Cracka
From The Beat: We know so many people who pray for guidance, but few who feel their prayers have been answered. What was the sign you got that changed your life? What will those changes mean in your future?

My Nickname

My nickname is Gandhi. I got my nickname in the hall of Marin. They call me Gandhi because they thought I was Indian, but I am really Mexican.

-Santiago
From The Beat: We can hardly think of anyone we'd rather be compared to than Gandhi, a man dedicated to non-violence and peace. Do you share his commitment to those values? After you tell people that you're Mexican, do their reactions to you change? How does it make you feel to be thought of as an Indian instead of as a Mexican?



My Grown Man

I get my grown man wit' my button ups and my dreads and my stunnas. Not yet fifteen, livin' like I'm twenty-four, doing time like a grown man, you know? Man, been livin' like a grown man since I was like an eleven-year-old, doin' it big, like always, ya dig?

-Baby James
From The Beat: Yeah, we can see how big you're doin' it now. You may be "livin' like a grown man," but you're thinking like a little boy. We your brain catches up with your body soon enough for you to avoid some extremely serious consequences waiting for you down the line that are all part of "doin' it big." Ya dig?

Danger Draws Me To Crime

Things that draw me to crime is the danger; I like it. I like runnin' from da boys. Money draws me to crime. The thing I do on an everyday basis draws me to crime. The homies draw me to crime. The way I like my life draws me to crime.

-Meezy
From The Beat: Do you like how the system draws you away from all that and puts you in a box, tells you what to do and when to do it? Maybe those who run these halls get their thrills from doing just that, but that doesn't make it right. There are all sorts of ways to feel that rush from danger. Try something like rock climbing or ocean swimming or giving a speech. All those things can make your hands sweat and your heart beat faster, but none will lead you to jail.

I'm Bored

I would have to say boredom makes me do crimes. Also, sometimes I want to have fun or get an intense high. I like getting that intensity from doing what I'm not supposed to be doing. That's what makes me do crimes.

When I'm with a lot of people, I like to do crimes. Even when I'm with two or three people, I still like to do crimes. When I'm with my homeboys, it's the best thing ever, especially if you know you're not going to get caught up.

-Playa Joey
From The Beat: Of course, you can never know you're not going to get caught up. We bet you thought you wouldn't get caught up this time, either, but here you are! We're not sure we buy that "intense high" explanation. After all, there are a lot of activities that are dangerous and thrill-producing, but which don't involve victimizing anyone. Learn to surf. Go snake hunting. Give a speech in front of a of people. All those things can cause your heart to beat faster without risking your freedom at all. When you think about doing crime for the "intensity of feelings" it gives you, then go to the next step of thinking about the intensity of feeling you get from being locked and answering to strangers.

Sent To A Town That I Hate

I was sent to a town that I hate
After my last parent threw me out
And locked the gate
I don't like the people there
So I smoke pot
But enough of that on negative

-Cracka
From The Beat: What do you mean by your "last parent"? Is that a blood relative, or one assigned to you by the system? Why did he or she put you out? What was your contribution to that drama? What town were you sent from? Did you go to school? What did you like about it? Be careful about hate, because in the end it can destroy the hater much more thoroughly than the hated...

What I Miss A Lot

I miss my family a lot because it's my fault. I never listened to my family. They always tell me the right way, because my dad has been through it. Peace out.

-Spooky
From The Beat: It's funny, isn't it, how much more important our families become once we're taken from them. When you get out of here, we hope you remember how much you missed them on the inside, so you won't take them for granted again.

My Life

My life is messed up
I always go to jail
I do not like Marin County
I would like to go back to San Francisco
When I get out
I'ma start a new life

-Jadian
From The Beat: What's better about San Francisco County than Marin County? How you're your new life be different from your old life? If you don't mind our asking, what makes your life messed up? What kind of help could you use to clean the mess up?

Not In My Right State Of Mind

I commit my crimes because sometimes I'm not in my state of mind. I also commit my crimes for being high or drunk. Sometimes I hang with the people that I think are good company when they really aren't, 'cause all they think about is getting in trouble. Or they just perk or just smoke.

-Cuervo

From The Beat: We think you have discovered a very important truth, which is that getting drunk or high makes it impossible to be rational, to reason things out in your own mind. That puts you in the position of doing things you don't even know you're doing, but which have consequences (like coming to the hall) which you will know very well. So use the fact that you are not high or drunk now, but thinking in your own clear state of mind, to address the problems of addiction. Alcohol addiction is one of the worst, because it's so easy to get, and because it is pushed everywhere. So it requires real strength and courage to say no to that next drink. But your life may depend on it. So if alcohol or drugs keep getting you into trouble, we strongly encourage you to find help. It's available. AA and NA are free. Give it a shot.

My Stupid Mistakes

When I get out I am going to change for good, because I saw my mom and dad cry and spend a lot of money for me. Well, I am sorry to my family, because of my stupid mistakes I do. Well, I got one thing to say: only God can judge me for my sin.

-Spooky

From The Beat: Maybe only God can judge you for your sin, Spooky, but unfortunately, the system can judge you for your crime. The judgments that God makes might play themselves out in the next life, but the judgments the system makes play themselves out right now, right here. We hope when you get out of here you'll remember why your mom and dad were crying, and what you have to do to keep that from happening again.

"Give me your rings
and your chain."
I was scared, so
I gave it to them.

I Feel Alone At Home

If I can start over again, I would try to work on my anger problem. I would need to work on my attitude. I'm one of those girls, that if I hear somebody talking about me, I would go ask them. But I don't usually go ask them, because I know I would get in a fight.

I want my mom to change, but I also want to change, too. My mom would always yell at me, but I would always talk back. I would try to calm myself, so I won't get mad. One of the reasons I get mad easily is because I feel alone at home. I love my parents and I don't want to have any problems with them.

-Abigail

From The Beat: It sounds like you've adopted some of the bad habits of your mother. But even if it's understandable that you would pick up your mom's patterns, that doesn't mean you can't change yourself (even if you can't change your mom). Why do you feel so alone at home? Are you ignored? Do you have friends? Brothers or sisters? We hope this doesn't sound silly to you, but maybe you could get a pet. A dog or a cat can be a great comfort, and they always love you no matter what.

Locked Up

I hate bein' in da hall, because I can't be posted wit' my ninjas, can't be wit' a female. I can't go shopping. I can't go to a party, just because I choose to get locked up. I'm going to try not to get locked up no more, but it's hard to stop.

-Cee

From The Beat: Well, we see the trap that you're in, Cee. You love posting on the block, and you hate being locked up. But guess what leads you to lock-up? It's being posted on the block. You're going to have to change some part of this equation, or you are doomed to repeat it again and again — except that it won't always be as easy as the hall...

Jacked Over A Thirty Pack Of Beer

One time my homeboy had a thirty pack of beer. He was having a party. Some guys came through his back window, took the beer, and got in their car and left. So we called up one of our older homies and he got it back.

-No Name

From The Beat: How did it make him feel to be the victim of robbery? Have you or he ever committed one? Do you think this was karma? Did anyone get hurt when your homies got the beer back?

I Wouldn't Change A Thing

If I could start over, I wouldn't change a thing. Everything that I've done and been through, I've learned from. If I'm able to change a bad decision or choice that someone makes for themselves, then it's worth me going through it.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Of course, you are the sum total of your experiences, good and bad. But you are much more than just the sum of your parts. You are a person with a brain and a soul, and the ability to change. Is it time to use that ability?

Two Steps Away From Placement

I have five more counts on my case. I wish I would've never done what I ever did. I hope I don't go to placement. I just want to get out so I can start school.

-Play Joey

From The Beat: But if you wanted to go to school, why did you pick up five new counts? Are you being honest when you say you want to get out to go to school? If you got out, is that what you'd do with your freedom? If so, maybe it would help to write the judge (and/or PO) a letter explaining why you did what you did and why you want a chance to go to school. It may not change anything, but you never know. Good luck!

Death

Death. So final. But is it really? Is death dying? No. When you are born, you are dead. When you turn sixteen, you are that many years dead. If you misbehave in the outer world, you receive more time to be alive on this planet — or should I say death on this hell? Death is freedom. Scientists have it all wrong. Death is birth. It is when you have been punished in hell for years and you have balanced out your evil-doings.

Some people get relief from this hell. That relief is faith. If you are on good behavior, you get faith. I, however, do not have such reliefs. I must have done something pretty horrible, because I feel every second of my life (in hell.) When I receive a blessing, my hopes rise and then fall twice as hard.

Another blessing is courage.

-Scorpion

From The Beat: Out of consideration for those who read The Beat, and especially our youngest readers, we omitted the final line of this already scary poem, Scorpion. We hope you understand. The problem we have with your analysis is that the feelings you have at this moment may change tomorrow — but death is forever. Once the line from life to death is crossed, you can never cross back. We don't know if you'll ever feel differently, but we do know that as long as you're alive, that possibility exists. We live for the possibilities.

On Being A Victim

The first time I got jacked was when I lived in Honduras. I was about ten and I was walking around the city. I had two gold chains on, one ring on my left hand, and two rings on my right hand. I was walking when three guys came up to me with guns and said, "Give me your rings and your chain." I was scared, so I gave it to them.

-Cuervo

From The Beat: Cuervo, you were very smart to give up your rings and chain. Gold can be replaced. A human life cannot. You wrote, "The first time" you got jacked. How many times have you been jacked? Why? Have you ever been the one doing the jacking? Why?

Queen Bee

Queen Bee

Yup, that's my name

And drugs and alcohol was also my game

Running away was the way

But now that I'm in here

Crying and sleeping is my game

-Queen Bee

From The Beat: Why were you running away, Queen Bee? Now that you have no access to drugs and alcohol, how are you managing without them? Do you think you'll have the strength to go without them when you're on the outs again? We hope you realize it's time to change your game.

One of the reasons I get mad
easily is because I feel
alone at home.

My Girlfriend, My Mom And My Music Brighten My Spirit

What brightens my spirit is my girlfriend, because I can talk to her about anything. My mom brightens my spirit because she knows how to get me up when I'm down. Just chillin' with my friends outside, listening to music, listening to some Mac Dre, L-40, Keak and any kind of music I want to.

-Kevin

From The Beat: You're lucky to have two women in your life who brighten your spirit. Now, what can you do to brighten theirs?

Soldado De La Calle

Being a Street Soldier is that you have to do a lot of work and you have to do your best to pass. You have to support your family and you have to do a lot of work and you would not like to fail it because it is the easiest class that you take. Street Soldiers is a big thing that you have to do and then the Beat Within help out.

One thing I like is that you try your best and you can't determine nothing if you don't want to because you are always going to have to work hard. I would like to do my best and always try to give your full attention, and you are always going too have to respect your elders and don't have to say yes too drugs. Say no to drugs.

-Willie

From The Beat: First, Willie, we want to apologize if we got some of your words wrong. We think you would like to take a little more time when you write to make sure your words are clear and can be read. But we also want to thank you for always participating in our workshops, and for always writing interesting things. We hope you always keep the lessons of Street Soldiers in your heart, and that you do your best in school and make your family and you proud of yourself.

Rules

Being a Street Soldier is nothing tough. It's just something that starts with four simple rules: 1) A friend will never lead you to danger; 2) Change begins with the individual; 3) There is nothing more valuable than an individual's life; and finally, 4) Respect comes from within.

Only those rules are for the rules of living. That's what Street Soldiers is about.

-Lisa

From The Beat: Thanks for explaining Street Soldiers so clearly, Lisa. All four of these rules together provide a really good framework for a young person to follow in order to succeed in school and in life, and in order to be a good person. Just keep being the good person that you are, and be an example for the younger kids who look up to you.

I Make A Difference

I'm a Street Soldier, a fighter till the day I'm dead. With The Beat Within, I fight for those who can't sleep in their bed. So follow your heart, the Beat Within.

-Nestlé Crunch

From The Beat: You always tell us to follow our heart, Gabreal, and we have followed it right into EPA Charter School! Thank you for all your contributions to The Beat, and good luck in school. Don't stop, because you DO make a difference.

Give A Pig A Pancake

If you give a pig a pancake, he will want syrup. He will get sticky, take a bath, want a picture, send them to friends, then want a tree house and get sticky again — and finally want more pancakes and syrup.

-Scarface

From The Beat: We don't want you in charge of a zoo! You'd give cookies and milk to the mice and pancakes and syrup to the pigs! Which do you like more, the mouse diet or the pig diet? You are one funny boy!

Street Soldiers Changed My Life

Street Soldiers has kinda changed my life because I used to be bad. But now I am good, and I listen. Street Soldiers is a good class, and it is a class that helps you from being really bad. They tell you what you should do and what not to do.

Sometimes it helps me out, but some adults are still making me really mad. Sometimes I would listen to the Street Soldier teachers. It is not good to drop out of school or do drugs because it will mess up your dreams. I learned they are called dream thieves.

-Lil' Sweatie

From The Beat: We can't believe you were ever bad, Lil' Sweatie, but we're very happy that you're good now, and that you listen. We think that Street Soldiers gives you some basic but very important rules to live by, and that if you follow those simple rules, you will have a very good future. Stay in school, and do your best. Thank you for always participating in The Beat. We have enjoyed having you in our workshops.

Liking The Beat

I like The Bea Within, and they have never ever got on my nerves. I liked it because you get to write letters like what I am writing this instant. And I love being with The Beat Within. I also participated in it. And they are giving us a privilege.

I also appreciate that they take their time to come with us and talk about things like when the "lights go out." I just want to say I am going to miss The Beat Within.

-Bat Man

From The Beat: Well, we feel the same way about you, Jose. We want to thank you for taking The Beat seriously, and for writing every week. Good luck in school. When we come back for the next session, we hope to see you.

I'll Miss The Beat

I would miss The Beat a lot

They helped me a lot...

The first time I looked in the mirror

I didn't see a lot

But now, since they're leaving

I'm kind of scared for them to leave

'Cause what if I have to see

The person I used to see...

But thank you, The Beat

You helped me a lot

I'm really looking forward

To balance my dreams along

-Black Panther

From The Beat: We really appreciate all your kind words, but remember, without you and the other writers, there would be no Beat Within. So we want to thank you for all of your contributions to The Beat. The world can be a scary place sometimes, so that's why the lessons you've learned in Street Soldiers should help you all through school and all through your life. If you always respect yourself and others, we don't think you have anything to be scared of. Stay in school. Do your best. And be a good person.

Street Soldiers

Street Soldiers really changed me 'cause it really made me think 'bout how we should never lead someone to change, and never leave nobody behind. And how we get to say whatever we gotta say. And real talk, it really made me think to not do drugs and bad things, to not hate on other people, to not be a leader and just be yourself.

-Lil' Shorty

From The Beat: We hope you always remember those important lessons about respecting yourself, respecting other people, and saying no to drugs. Also, stay in school and graduate! Thanks for writing in The Beat.

Arigato Gozaimasu

Thank you, The Beat Within. You have given us something we can express yourself. I think you gave us a privilege in order to express what we are with people we don't know.

Beat, you are the best people to give us a reason to write. You rock! Thank you.

-Doshima Dokanawa

From The Beat: Daitoshimushte! You're welcome! Even though you sometimes drove us crazy with your questions (and even though we suspect that was sometimes what you were hoping to do...), we have thoroughly enjoyed your presence in our workshops. You added a whole lot by your comments and questions and bubbly personality! We know you will go far in life (if you don't drive too many people crazy), and we are sure you are going to love Japan. Now study hard, and make your mother proud!

Rose

Did you know that a rose

It is a nice plant

But it have thorns on the stem

Do you know why

It because it want to be safe

But it is the same thing with us

That people look nice

But their thorns are inside

It mean it try not to get hurt

-Baby Girl

From The Beat: We really like the poetic way you express things, Baby Girl. When you say people are like roses because they can be pretty on the outside but they have protective thorns on the inside, you are using a metaphor (when you write that something is like something else). We agree with your metaphor, even though all we can see in you is the sweetness of the rose and not its thorns. Continue to be sweet, and continue to do your best in school. Thank you for being such a good Beat writer.

Thank You, Beat

Thank you for letting us write in The Beat. Everything is great. I wouldn't change anything. The topics get us writing, and the things you tell us to write is nothing offensive to us. Thank you.

-Lisa

From The Beat: You're welcome, Lisa, but we are the ones who want to say thank you to you! Without you (and the other writers), we wouldn't even have a Beat Within. We know that you will stay in school, graduate and then do some special things in your life.

Rules For Living

Being in Street Soldiers help me to make good choices and to try to do the four rules for living. I am now more respectful to my brother, and especially to my mom and my father. I don't have the "I don't care" attitude, but I had it in the past. Street Soldiers help me to recognize which person is good for me. Those are some things that the class Street Soldiers help me.

-Ronaldinho

From The Beat: We think you are an excellent Street Soldier, and you have been an excellent participant in The Beat. We will miss having you in our workshops, but we will keep our eyes on the professional world of soccer so that we can see you again some day!

Standing For What You Believe

What it means to be a Street Soldier is that you will stand for what you believe. You will be faithful to your peers, and never take drugs. The steps to becoming a Street Soldier is first, you have to know your respect can never be taken away. Value your life. And don't lead a friend to danger. You do that and you will become a Street Soldier.

-Lil' Lover

From The Beat: These are such important lessons to learn while you're still young, so that you won't even begin to go down a bad road. If you never start doing bad things, you never have to worry about quitting later one when it's so hard. We think you make a very fine Street Soldier, and it's been a pleasure having you in our workshop. Thank you.

Yes To School, No To Drugs

I learned that drugs are not good for you, and not to drop out of school so we can make it to our dreams when we are older enough to drive. Even though I drove Ms. Thompson crazy, she is still a nice teacher.

-Cristobal

From The Beat: We can see how you might drive your teachers crazy from time to time, Cristobal, but we also appreciate your honesty and willingness to share with The Beat. Thank you for writing. Stay in school and be good!

The King Of Soccer

I think The Beat was really fun. I got to write on some interesting topics. Mostly, I wrote about soccer, and mostly my dreams for the future. Writing about all those topics was fun. I really enjoyed them.

Actually, The Beat Within was my favorite part of "Street Soldiers" and some of the things I wrote was really private. But I got the courage. Thank you, Beat Within.

-Ronaldinho

From The Beat: We want to thank you for having the courage to write about some private things in The Beat. We can see that you have a very good future ahead of you. You are smart. You are dedicated. And you are a good person. And, as if all that isn't enough, you are also going to be a star soccer player.

Los Soldado De Las Calles

A los soldado de la calle se les llaman callejeros, pandilleros, mariguaneros, rateros porque se las pasan el mayor tiempo robando, violando a las personas o matando. Yo pienso que ellos hacen eso porque no les ha de costar en pensar que van a lastimar a toda una familia. Otras personas hacen estas cosas como juego con las personas como si fueran juguetes.

From The Beat: Entonces deberías de alejarte de los lugares donde ellos se ponen. No te juntes nunca con ningunos de ellos. ¿Que consejos les darías a estas gente para que cambien su manera de hacer sus cosas? ¿Hay alguna forma que alguien que sea de esta manera cambie?

The Soldiers From The Streets

You call the soldiers from the streets street-roamers, gangsters, weed-heads, and pilferers because they spend the majority of their time stealing and violating people, or killing them. I think that they do this because to them, it is nothing to hurt one entire family. Other people do these kinds of things to people as a game like if people were toys.

-Luis

From The Beat: Then you should distance yourself from the places where they hang out. Don't ever associate yourself with any of these kinds of people. What words of advice would you give these people so they can change the way they do what they do? Is there any way someone who is like this could change?

Improve Your Lessons, Beat

The Beat needs to improve the lessons they give to the kids. They should know what they saying to the kids. We should listen to what The Beat is saying that one day it going to save us so we won't give up with our dreams we all have in our minds.

-No Name

From The Beat: It's too bad that you forgot to put your name on this last piece of writing for The Beat. We don't know who we are responding to, but we hope you know who you are! We wish you had told us which lessons we need to improve, but anyway, we have enjoyed our writing workshops at EPA Charter, and so we thank you (whoever you are) for all you have contributed.

The Beat Within

I think that The Beat Within shouldn't change anything because it is already fine the way it is. It is Street Soldiers that should been changing the rules, not The Beat Within!

-Jorge

From The Beat: Well, we like getting compliments, Jorge, but we wish you would have explained that last sentence to us. What do you think Street Soldiers should change? What did you like about it, and what didn't you like about it? Anyway, we want to thank you for all your writing and contributions to The Beat. We have enjoyed having you in the workshops!

Wouldn't Change A Thing

If I was running The Beat Within, I would not change a thing. I said that because they help you on how much you need. I would not change their attitude because if you want to change their attitude, they were used all the nicest attitude you can ever think about. They are really using that attitude. I wouldn't care if they use any attitude on me. I would still like Street Soldiers and The Beat Within.

-Li' E

From The Beat: Well, we appreciate you as much as you appreciate us. Without you and the other writers, we wouldn't even have a Beat Within! Thank you for writing for us, and don't forget to stay in school and do your best!

Ser Soldado De La Calle

Siento que ser un soldado de la cárcel es estar siempre protegido por tus amigos quienes nunca te dejan abajo.

From The Beat: ¿Crees que los amigos de la calle se pondran enfrente a recibir una vala por un soldado?

Being A Soldier From The Street

I feel like being a soldier from the street is always being protected by your friends that will never let you down.

-Rafael

From The Beat: Do you believe that the friends from the street will get in front and take a bullet for a soldier?

A Great Program

I think The Beat Within is a great program, and I think next quarter the other kids would like to talk about their lives — the most exciting and the less exciting things that happen in their lives. The Beat had good topics for the last couple of weeks by the way, and I'm gonna miss ya Beat Within! So, I hope you guys or the kids next quarter have some new topics. Peace. The Beat Within.

-GPC

From The Beat: We don't recognize your initials, so we're not sure who we're writing back to. But anyway, we want to say thank you for your kind words about us. We'll miss you too because this has been a lot of fun for all of us. Don't forget to stay in school, do your best, and make yourself and your family proud of you.

I Love The Beat Within

I have been with The Beat Within for two months, and every time they came, I love it. I loved to write about the topic. But sometimes I think they can do better on their topic. They can improve if they just try a little harder. But so far, I love The Beat Within. Keep up the good work.

-Tony

From The Beat: Well, Tony, you know how much we have loved having you in our workshops. You always say things that make us think — even when we disagree with you. We're sure your advice is correct — we can all do better by trying a little harder. Do you have any suggestions for topics that you wish we had written about? Anyway, good luck in school. Don't forget how much you hate drugs! (And don't forget to find that beautiful Chinese girl to fall in love with...)

More Choices

I liked The Beat. I would run it the same way. I would give more choices. I ain't hating on ya, but you didn't give a lot of choices. I would give the choice of "About Me," "Girlfriend/Boyfriend," and "Streets."

-Scarface

From The Beat: We appreciate this criticism, Scarface, because we always like suggestions for more topics. Even though you usually gave us less writing than we wanted from you, we always liked what you wrote and what you said in the workshops. Don't ever leave school. Get a good education so you can have a good life. We'll be seeing you. Thank you for participating in The Beat workshops.

It's Changed The Way I Think

I think that Street soldiers has really changed the way that I think about the way I might act or other actions. I really like Ms. Pucket, Ms. Thompson and Ms. Jenny. I like their attitudes and the way they show that they really do care about us, and that they want us to do good in life.

-Sweet Heart

From The Beat: You are so lucky to have teachers that care about you as much as your teachers do. Now, you can show them how much you like and respect them by remembering the lessons of Street Soldiers, staying in school and going on to college, and having a good and successful life!

Express Yourself

The Beat Within is something that you could express yourself. You don't need to say it out loud, but you could write and no one will know you wrote it. But the true meaning of The Beat Within is that you get a chance to write and to have The Beat Within because not everyone has this!

The number one topic that I like was "What do you see when you wake up?" I like this topic because I had a lot of pressure in me, but when I wrote, I felt better.

-Heart Broken

From The Beat: You don't know how happy it makes us feel to read that The Beat gave you a chance to get things off your chest, and that you felt better after you did it. That's one of the best compliments we could ever get. We hope you keep doing well in school and that you keep yourself away from the bad stuff out on the streets. We also hope that you keep writing. Even though The Beat workshop is finished, that doesn't mean your writing is finished. When that pressure builds up, put it down on paper, even if you are the only one who gets to read it. Thank you for all your contributions to The Beat, and good luck with school and with life.

Acting Like A Fool

Every day from Monday to Thursday, I came to Street Soldiers acting like a fool. But it look like I was just playing around. But really I learned a lot. Although I drove my third-grade teacher crazy, she never give up on me.

-Tony

From The Beat: What do you mean your third grade teacher? We thought you were in the 6th grade... We can't believe that you drove your teacher crazy, Tony, and we don't even think you acted like a fool. You made us laugh — and sometimes you almost made us believe the foolish stories you told us! Don't forget the lessons you learned in Street Soldiers, and use those lessons as you move through school to a successful conclusion, and the good life we see in your future.

I say unto you my brother...
If you don't see the free world again,
Know that I love you
like no other brother
Through your frivendship I have
learned to stand strong...

TERRY LYNN LAVERY JR. This first time writer from Clallam Bay Correction Center in Clallam Bay, WA, sends an urgent message to children who are free, yet on the verge of making the mistake of doing something to get them locked up. And in her message you can see the compassion seeping from the page. It's amazing for us to witness how concerned the older generation is for the younger generation. And even more amazing that the older people take time out of their day as if in desperation to save these young lives. Writers like this one remind us of why we enjoy working here so much. So thank you...

In Memory Of A Fallen Brother

As I sit here in this brick jungle,
I can't help to think of how I used to be so humble...
My days are numbered here in the depths of tragedy...
But with me I shall try to take
Some of my brothers' pain and agony.
For I know that the world outside of these high walls
And razor wire
Will not let my dreams and goals expire...
I say unto you my brother...
If you don't see the free world again,
Know that I love you like no other brother
Through your friendship I have learned to stand strong...
I truly believe you did know wrong.
Many who fall prey to this corrupt system
Are wrongly accused...
'Yet', by all this turmoil in politics
The public is left confused...
I ask this one question,
"How can an innocent man get justice?"
When people wake up and realize
Just how the laws they vote for were made to screw us

Listen Up!

I want to send a message
To young people who are free.
This is an urgent warning,
So you don't end up like me.
For I have lost my freedom
Robbery 1st degree
90 months playing the game,
Now #764173
I'm locked inside a steel cage
And concrete walls of agony...
Where there's no sunshine or joy,
Only bitterness, regret, pain, and rage...
I've only painful memories
Of the life and love I lost...
I played the game...
Made my mistakes;
'Now' I'm paying the cost.
So listen carefully to my warning!
Stay far from drugs and crime,
Or you may wake up some morning (like me)
In a cage of steel doing time!

RIO

These next three poems are sent to us by an incredible writer from the South East Correctional Center in Charleston, Missouri. The first one is obviously for a lost love. The second one is rightfully dedicated to his kids. And the last one is sort of a tribute to soldiers — there are many different kinds according to Rio. If you're into poetry, you'll definitely be into this next writer.

Soldiers Stay Strong

There are soldiers who ride and soldiers who die
Soldiers out on the streets and soldiers inside
Soldiers who fight and soldiers who run
Soldiers who don't finish and soldiers who get done
Soldiers who spread out and soldiers who stick together
Soldiers out on sunny days and soldiers in stormy
weather
Soldiers who fight for the good and soldiers who fight for
the bad
Soldiers who stay happy and soldiers who get sad
Soldiers who never cry and soldiers who shed tears
Soldiers who last days and soldiers who last years
But no matter what happens whether it's right or it's
wrong
No matter what's the circumstance — Soldier Stay Strong
(To all soldiers — young or old, rash or bold — Stay
Strong!)

I say unto you my brother...
If you don't see the free world again,
Know that I love you like no other brother
Through your friendsv hip
I have learned to stand strong...
I truly believe you did know wrong.

Crazy

Many nights seem to go by
With thoughts of you that make me cry
It's been four long years without you near
Still I went ahead with my scheme
Not stopping to think it would be a shattered dream
To me you will always be more precious than diamonds
or gold
And you love me the same or so I'm told
This is the debt I pay for being so crazy
But remember, I love you, love daddy
(Dedicated to my kids I love so much)

Secret Lovers

You were a storm, destructively brewing on the coast
Instead of avoiding you I grabbed my coat and hit the
boat
I was in the middle of you, Typhoon, when I met despair
The love that we built with such tender love and care
Was leaking very badly and quickly from somewhere
What was I to do, what choices should I make?
Only our love's death lied all around in the front and in
my wake
Solemnly I held up my heart to you as a flag of truce
But you just laughed at me and I knew then that it was
of no use
The storm you were had me in your claws crushing me
in your grips
How foolish of me to believe the word "Love" rolling
from your lips
It was never meant to be and should never have began
There was no way we could be "Lovers" when we
couldn't be friends
What an end!

FRISKIE

One of the saddest experiences we at The Beat have to face is when one of our young writers gets out of the halls or the Y, comes to work for us full of promise and potential — then falls back into old patterns and habits that lead right back to lock-up. That is the case with Friskie, formerly a resident of the San Mateo juvenile hall, then a ward of CYA's facility for females in Ventura, then an intern in our office, and now — again — in CYA. It breaks our hearts when we see young people we like returned to the box, but we read Friskie's letter to us and it gives us hope that this time, maybe, with luck, the lessons she's learned will actually make a difference in the life she lives. We miss her, and want her back.

Reach Out

Look into the eyes of a stranger
Tell me what is it that you see?
Do you see someone perfect?
Or do you see someone like me?
Open up your eyes
The world every day has a new surprise
Your soul needs feeding
So keep on proceeding
Listen up as I mend your broken wings
Come and dance as I begin to sing
Listen with a joyful heart
For you and your loved ones are never apart
You carry them with you deep inside
So be careful how you carry them
Life can be a bumpy ride
Take off your mask young friend
You have nothing you need to hide
If you need love, I can give that much
After all every person needs human touch
You and I both have a purpose
It's there, I swear, somewhere beneath the surface
Trust me when I say this will soon pass
You grow up sometimes a little bit too fast
But people grow and people change
But a person's heart don't say the same
Let go and let live
Give the world what you have to give.
Trust someone and show them your heart,
Because a rose can't grow if it's kept in the dark

I only feel bad
About hurting my big brother
and my moms
Because they were there for me
And they treated me bomb
I'm sorry

Can't Find Happiness

Get ready to catch me
I'm slick as butter
Coming at you like damn
More loveable than your mother
I'm that sheisty girl
That'll make you fall in love
Lookin' like an angel
Sent from heaven above
Beautiful on the outside
But on the inside I'm cold and dark
I'm hella sick
A super fly chick
That'll get you sprung so fast, so quick
But when it all goes wrong
Somethin' gots to go right
That's my angel baby
He's my only light
Love me or smother me
In my eyes it's all the same
Because you can't find happiness
Without a little pain

Dear Beat

Hey there, how are you doing? As for myself, well I'm alright. In all that I've endured recently, I think that I'm doing relatively well. You know, I got clean on my own and I turned myself in. I needed to get away from the things I had ran to when I got out.

I was in the hall for a week but they kept me in isolation. I missed going to the office and stuff — that was a great experience for me. And as for life, I learned a great lesson: the power a person possesses is nothing compared to the power of addiction. I gave up everything for meth — my family, my friends, my job, school, my integrity, and dignity for meth. And I look back and think, what the hell? Am I crazy?

I don't know if anyone told you, but I OD'd and I should be dead. Can you imagine, this is a letter from a ghost that was given a second chance. I'm starting to think that maybe I have a purpose here on this planet. I'm not just some empty being that's here to take up space.

Well, I'd like to hear from you. Talk to you soon.

Loose Thoughts

(Dedicated To Mervyn and Moms)

Lost and feeling lonely
No one here that can hold me
People are wrong when they say
Love don't cost a thing
It costs everything
Including your heart, soul, and brain
After the love's lost
All you feel is the heartache and pain
Alone in the rain
Got nothing left to gain
Feels like all hope is gone
You're left hurting so bad
It feels like you can't go on
I'm losing grip on reality
I'm stuck in a daze
Thinking I lost out on a great thing
Because of my foolish ways
I feel like I'm tryna find
My way out of a maze
I just feel
As though I'll see no better days
I lost myself so long ago
I don't even know who I am
I lost all of my morals
I have no idea where I even stand
I didn't lose my dignity
Or my self-respect
However, that don't mean
I didn't lose the rest
I got an ache in my chest
Oh wait, that's my heart
The thing I never listened to ever since the start
I put myself in danger
And out of anger
I put myself at risk
I even was considering
Being some pimp's "bitch"
But I'm worth more than turning tricks
So I backed down
And went back to the town
All over the Bay
I stay where I wanna stay
But now I'm back in the Y
Unable to cry
I feel no remorse
Once again of course
I only feel bad
About hurting my big brother and my moms
Because they were there for me
And they treated me bomb
I'm sorry
I did you guys wrong
I love you
There's the end of my song

A Trip

I'm in a cage, inside a box, inside a cage...
Secured by cops with glocks, a mini, and a pistol grip gauge!

And silence is mandatory...
Enforced by violence and memories of violent stories!
And my name ain't chuck, yet I'm stuck...
Immobilized by shackles and cuffs!
Some might say..."I just don't give a huh!"
Some might think..."I'm just shhh out of luck!"
But one thing I know... as I roll on this bus!
Is the only baggage I carry...
Is guilt, regrets, and disgust!

When you play the game
And roll the dice...
You can't complain
About the price!
The stakes were high
If you cared enough...
You wouldn't have called the devil's bluff!

One, two, three,
Four, five, six...
Is the number of times
I've been on this trip!
Different route,
But to the same destination...
I'm finally figuring out,
It was an open invitation.

Six, five, four,
Three, two, one...
There is absolutely nothing new,
Under the sun...
What we are doing
Has already been done...

Quit chasing the wind
The end

FRANK RAMOS

Currently calling himself Pistol (we preferred "The Kid" or "Solomon"), Frank Ramos gives us "A Trip" — and it's just that, a trip! With rhymes that challenge minds, he leads us through a life that's now burdened with the baggage of "guilt, regrets, and disgust!" But there's nothing disgusting about this thought-provoking poem. Its final image should make anyone stop and ponder... "Pistol" spits his poetry from the California State Prison in Lancaster.

Has already begun...
Dum, ditty, dum dum,
Come and step right on in...
Run fizzy, run, run,
And let the side show begin!
For we're all just characters,
Playing the role on "Broadway"...

Some learning the hard way,
And burning with heartache!

It's a trip, this trip; How it grips then rips, your reality apart...

Into bits and pieces, segments that teach us,
The heights and depths of our hearts...

Misery loves company and my only company is my misery...
For as I travel towards my future all I carry is my history..

The present is a present because tomorrow is uncertain...
But you must receive it as a gift,
Before the director calls it "curtains!"

It's been said that before your life ends,
Your whole life flashes before your eyes...
So you can understand why every time I've taken this trip,
I thought it was to meet my demise!
And not to my surprise, the last thing I saw, was a fallen pigeon...

There on the floor, next to the door...
Was a fallen pigeon...

MICHAEL ALVAREZ

If any of you plan on getting married or have someone you stay faithful to, then we have something we think you should read this week. This next writer, who writes from Glen Mills in Concordville, Pennsylvania gives us great information about relationships. It's part two of a piece he gave us awhile ago. And in his letter to us he apologizes for the delay in getting us the second part. Don't worry, we above anybody, know that at certain times our focus is directed in certain areas and other things are left on the back burner. We appreciate that you brought us to the front ones again.

Common Sense In Love

(Continued...)

I would offer the same suggestion with even greater vehemence for the conduct of girls in this critical affair. Girls desire marriage more than men do. Being numerically superior, they have a more restricted choice than men; and as a consequence of her liabilities as a mother; an unsuccessful marriage will bring greater hardship to the wife than to the husband. It would be absurd to attempt general advice to women about men. No one can safely predict that a given man will not prove satisfactory to a given woman.

I would venture but on generalization. Beware of one man who men do not like. Such men often fascinate and are adored by women, but never for long. A moment always comes when a woman learns, as a rule, that the masculine judgment was right. The girl should acquire knowledge concerning not merely the financial status of the possible man, but about his health and particularly about his tastes, for she will be more

at the mercy of his taste than we of hers. It is astonishing, it is pathetic, the small quantity of information couples usually obtain about each other—no more, sometimes than their respective preference in furniture and in theatrical entertainment. Once the choice has been made, for good or evil, the young woman should think conscientiously about a matter, which has a greater influence upon the success of or failure of a marriage than anything else lying outside the affection.

The young man must reasonably demonstrate his ability to maintain a wife, and a household in a satisfactory manner. But supposing that the young man's mother were to say to the girl, "you want to marry my son, run his house, bring up his children? I must request you to prove that you can run a house, buy food economically, cook it appetizingly, make rooms attractive, keep order, be punctual." And so on. Girls are apt to imagine that in giving their hearts they have given all the mutual bargain of marriage demands from them. Love is enormous; but love is not enough. To be wife is a profession from my point of view, and a skilled and learned profession at that. While she is engaged in loving, she should also be engaged in more material affairs. You may cry out against reason and practicality and household efficiency — but there is nothing like these for supporting love in its flight against time. The tendency of the age is toward marriages of reason. A good tendency! But courtships of reason are equally to be desired.

ERIC FOSTER

Like all great serial novels, Eric Foster leaves us at the end of one drama and the beginning of another in the latest chapter of his running autobiography, his story of life in South Central Los Angeles. It's got it all — love and sex, grimy streets, cops and robbers, jealousy, fear, excitement — and the promise of more to come. We can't wait. Mr. Foster spins his life out from the state prison in San Diego, Ca.

This Is My Life: The Testament, Part X

From the beginning of the day my hunch told me this was not going to be a good day. Long ago through much drama, I learned to trust my feelings. More than not, they were my best weapon. The streets were always a bad disease of influence towards the minds of youth in the city. Soon as you caught this plague, eventually it would take your soul.

We all were more comfortable with just calling it "the game" because it fit in our minds better. Life was troublesome, and a lot more so in the summer time. When I sometimes sat back and thought about the city of South Central (Los Angeles), I envisioned often images of a long forgotten concentration camp. Perhaps getting the plague was as unavoidable as a crack head needing another hit.

Nevertheless LA was the place to be; from day one I fell in love. Where else in the world could you mention a city with this type of history and get praised for it. Truly there were always a lot of diamonds in the rough... we just didn't understand how to let our talent shine. Keeping it real, for most square people I think the mention of a person from South Central was their cue to run — or make sure they were not about to get robbed.

"What the feezezy happened to you dog?" I asked. "Were you home all day? Man, me and Diet got caught slippin' big time. We were looking for you all morning," Tren said with anger in his voice and eyes probing me like a dart. Him standing here like this made me feel like gunk at the bottom of a spoiled trashcan.

"My bad! I'm sorry. I ditched school 'cause I had plans to kick back with Janet, just the two of us. I didn't imagine something like this would happen." I explained. "This whole day has just gone to crap. God somebody is gonna pay. Janet and me are in a jam right now too."

"Are you telling me a freaking girl is more important than this," Tren barked. His forehead had so many angry wrinkles in it he looked like an air vent cover.

"No! You're an idiot! All I'm saying is she is in my room right now and I need your help because moms and my sister are home already," I revealed.

"Well I'll be... Man, I don't give a crap about that. She isn't my girl. Besides, she is probably the reason all this is turning out the way it is," Tren said.

"Look butt hole, are you gonna help or not?" I asked. "Yeah, whatever."

"All right, go around and meet me at my window," I said. He began walking before he stopped and turned around to face me once more.

"Hey! Tell me something... Did you hit?" Tren asked with a bright smile on his face.

"You're sick, you know that. Besides it's none of your bees wax. Get a life. You're such a donkey fool."

He let out a high-pitched laugh as I entered the door on my way back to start the mission impossible.

Janet had to try to understand the issue at hand. One way or the other I was going out into the night with my boy Tren and try at some get back. My, my, the simple thought of it just tasted so sweet.

"Eric, please don't do this. I mean for what? Why?" Janet said with motherly concern.

"Look, I just can't leave my boy hanging. It just ain't right. Plus you already know we don't let things like this just go. Two times in two weeks, one homie and now the other... No! I don't think so," I argued.

"I hate him, you know that. Honestly, he probably deserved it anyways. Why should you go running out there like Buck Rogers? You only care about him and those fools and not me," Janet announced.

"I'm not doing this with you Janet. Right now it's serious and I gots to do what I gotta do, like it or not. I can walk you home or you can just sit there and look stupid."

She was doing just that, looking at me tuck the pistol in my pant's pocket. Her brown ebony eyes always had a way of making me see everything inside her. I turned and jumped out the window into the sinister dusk of night.

As we walked, my mind and heart relentlessly play tug a war with the other. Actually I couldn't believe I'd gotten myself into mess. Boy was I an idiot. I'd rather be back at my house in my warm bed with my fantasy girl Janet. Here I was walking in the cold with a pistol. Perhaps I had the plague like so many others. Sometimes being respected plainly just sucked! The little devil on my shoulder told me to pull the pistol on Tren and shoot him and go back to bed with Janet.

"Shut up," I thought out loud.

"Who are you talking to, Dog?" Tren asked.

"Nobody, don't trip. Let's just hurry up. It's so cold I can feel my family jewels in my stomach and it only proves my fact."

"What's that?" Tren asked.

"That you really are a donkey."

I had all the love in the world for my boy. He just had an annoying habit of showing up at the wrong times. It would make any person think to their self, why me? I could only hope everyone would be on time on the block. Still I was shaking inside with cold, rage and anger. (Sometimes pride is our own enemy)

As usual, Move, Sandra (Jokes) and Diet were hanging out on the abandoned couch. Standing there looking down at the three of them I could tell this was a forbidden night. It seemed the nights of the LA streets had the powers to call upon the angels of darkness by personal will. You could almost smell hate and rage in the mist of the night like the instincts of a rabid primal animal. It was cold and too quiet for the turns of events surely to come in the night.

"Well, did you bring the hot rocks?" Move asked.

"Yeah... sure. I still think it was the same guys that beat up Diet the other morning on our way to school. This whole thing is fishy even today. Something just doesn't seem right," I told them.

"Yeah! You're right. Two of my dogs got tips put on them and we were just sitting here. I want some butts!" Move shouted with anger.

I know life is hard but Move was sort of a big extremist. Being around him while he was like this was like being in the presence of a time bomb with the sure promise of death in its hands.

Sitting here plotting ungodly works, he had plans for all of us this night. Little did we know he would work tonight. Or it might have just been the thought in the mind. Right now I was not sure of anything as my heart rate continued to pick up. The car coming down the street with it's loud music caught all of us by surprise. As the car and its driver passed by I felt the urge to curse the unknown driver out. He might be on his way home from work or from cheating on his wife. Whatever the case, he looked as if he were driving drunk anyways. I wish I could have been wasted right now. If anything it at least would be a benefit for the cold night. Looking at my wrist for the time, I suddenly realized I forgotten my watch.

"Say Jokes, what time is it?" I asked.

"It's seven twenty three," she replied with a low voice. I knew Jokes fairly well, and I could tell she had something crawling up her butt. Usually she was not this quiet with her eyes on planet Pluto. Something was eating her pretty bad as I watched her nibble on what was left of her nails.

"Hey girl, give your nails a break. What is biting at you? It's only obvious," I said.

"Nothing, I just don't feel good. It's hot," she said. "I'm even sweating a little. I feel like going home, that's all."

"Hey fool, it's a woman thing, that time of the month, PMS you know," Diet said interjecting.

"Why don't you just shut up, dumb ass! You don't know squat. You would forget your head every morning if it was not connected to your body," she said with a higher tone.

Jokes did not like anyone to try and make her out to be less than tough. She was feminine without a doubt, but had a spark of fire in her that very few could actually get to understand. On hard-core levels, she could hang with some of the best. She never was afraid to get her hands dirty. All the guys loved that about her. It made her special. If there

continued previous page

was anything too rough or too difficult for her, she had help. We'd all protect her in a heartbeat. I guess she felt as if she were on top of the world at times because she was spoiled by us like a little sister. Maybe it was her luck to have so many brothers because of her wild side. Whatever the case, she had love and respect from all of us and stayed spoiled and protected.

I knew Diet was totally off base. His thoughts were stupidity. More so, I did feel a hint of what Jokes was really trying to hit on. Simultaneously as I even pondered the thought, two undercover narc cars spun around the corner. The closer the cars got, we realized they were actually C.R.A.S.H units, which meant "Community Resource Against Street Hoodlums." They were a tough and pretty devious band of thugs themselves. We all jumped up and ran just as the first car jumped the curb and the doors began to fly open. Running, all I could think about was why the heck did I get myself into this mess. Quickly the troubling thought faded as the clash of keys and body gear sounded behind me, bringing me back to reality.

"Police! Freeze now! Police! Stop right there!" I never understood why they thought you'd stop just because they said it. With a pistol in my pocket, I surely was not going to stop. It seemed like every dog in the neighborhood began to bark as we jumped the chain-linked fence. Once I looked up, I only saw Diet and Jokes running beside me. From the barking of the dogs and howling in the night, the city had let us know that the angels of darkness had been released. I could feel the venomous plague coming to life in the veins. Trying to hold it back or deny it was futile. Now hiding behind a weed bush, suddenly I recalled the thought of Jokes saying she felt hot. I surly was not cold anymore in the dilemma of this moment.

For the first few moments, everything became silent almost letting us hear our own heartbeats. Without delay, clearly the beeping sound of an officer's walkie-talkie cut through the night air swiftly. The crummy things always gave away an officer's point of position, and prevented us from being caught a lot of times. In that factor we had a good advantage. I knew we couldn't stay pinned down in the same place for long. Surely a dog and helicopter were already on the way to help in the hunt. I signaled to Diet and Jokes the run path we'd take once I devised the mission impossible.

I picked up a first-sized rock, and waited for the right moment. There was a beep followed by four more annoying ones. While laying on my back, I threw the rock hard enough so it would reach the side of the garage. Turns out it landed and worked perfectly. Sometimes it was annoying the types

ERIC FOSTER (CONT.)

of things you could find in a persons backyard.

"Suspects on north-west end of the yard. My twenty is south of that. Request back up. Possible sixth suspect," the officer's voice sounded.

"Ten four... back up and K-9 in route. Tack eight clear," sounded from his radio.

The idiot had bought it, just like all the others. I almost laughed as we made a clean getaway. I had first learned the trick in my own back yard. One day while my sister Alicia was looking for me to wash dishes, I threw a rock and she went looking for me along the other side of the yard. I made it out that night too, because the truth was, in the situations, most people's common sense always failed them.

I summoned that the worst of this night was over. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but wonder if Move and Tren got away clean or not. Sitting on the bus, the three of us were able to relax and let out a sigh of fresh air. Other riders on the bus seemed to be taking special notice to the three of us. I almost started to say something, but I thought better of it.

I realized why we were the highlight on the bus. I had dirt covering my pants and shirt along with grass and what smelled like dog urine. Jokes and Diet were no better off. Aside from the dead grass in her hair, Jokes looked like she'd been in a tornado.

"So, who's up for going to school tomorrow?" Diet asked.

"Shhh... Screw school! I'm surly not going after everything that's happened tonight," I announced. "Well hey, can I sleep over your pad tonight, fool?" Jokes asked. "I don't feel like hearing a long lecture from my mom right now."

"Whatever, I guess so," I said with slight disgust. Like most nights, I jumped in my window using it as my private door. While helping Jokes in through the window, I took notice to the shoe prints on my windowsill. I'd really have to remember to clean that soon. Soon as she was through the window, a forgotten reality hit me.

"Okay, now I understand why your running off was so, so important," Janet said, coming out of the dark corner. "Where did you find this trash anyway? Just look at her," she said.

Before I could say anything, Jokes ran towards her with a closed fist and ...
(To be continued...)

MICHAEL CABRAL

Although the following letter was not meant to be published (it accompanied an entry for the Beat writing contest, "Turning Back The Hands Of Time" which you patient readers will just have to wait for), it is so compelling and well written, we just had to share it with you. At age 19, Michael Cabral has become someone whose contributions The Beat most looks forward to. He never fails to challenge us to think... and to weep. Michael writes us from Pelican Bay State Prison.

A Letter

Dear Beat,

Foremost, and as always, I hope and pray that all is well in your part of the world! This is just a brief note to let you know I received "The Beat." You are always more than welcome to share anything I write to you! Because I don't think I'm going to tell you any lies anyway! So I have nothing to hide.

Thank You, Beat, for making me look and feel like maybe I'm not just another "street punk" caught up in the system. I just wish I didn't have to come to prison to feel that way! It's crazy, because on the streets I was always the street-punk rejected by the system. Three months into my 9th grade year, I had already been expelled from three high schools! So, just barely a freshman, I was already done with school.

Right after my 17th birthday though, about one month

before I caught my first and only case, I tried to enroll myself back into school. It should have been my senior year, but I told them I'd start all over if that's what it took. Three schools flat out said "no." Another one said for me to come back... twice... and then said "no."

I had never felt so worthless in my life. Seventeen years old, and all I wanted was to go to school. Instead, I had to work one full-time job at a tile company, a part-time job as a dishwasher and a "side hustle" as a pot dealer! Actually, I had already been working for a while, but I was well past ready to quit for a high school education.

As soon as they said no, I enlisted in the United States Army with my big brother. It seemed like something I could get into and I even looked forward to it! But six days away from going to boot camp — from starting a life that might have made sense, that may have even been "normal" — I caught a murder.

We'll get into that some other time though. For now? Well, I said that to say this: I didn't give up then, I won't give up now. Thank You for listening, Beat. It feels good to let stuff out sometimes.

PAUL JAY REED

Whatever "free" people think of those we hide behind thick walls and razor ribbon (walls designed as much to keep us "good" people from the guilty knowledge of what goes on in our names as to keep "bad" people locked in), anyone who reads *The Beat* knows that in these pages can be found not only poetry and prose that rival the best, but also some of the greatest moral teachers of our time. Such is the case with Paul Jay Reed. It is not just the quality of his writing that blows our minds (check out "Dark Warriors"), it is also the strength of his character that shines through in such pieces as "Using Your Moral Compass." Hardly a week passes without *The Beat* benefiting from something new we receive from this gifted writer and thinker. Paul Jay Reed writes us from a jail in Beaumont, Texas.

Using Your Moral Compass

Growing up, I was a Boy Scout and spent a lot of my time hanging out in the woods. To this day, I love few things more than I do hiking through the woods or camping. Boy Scouting not only cultivated in me a love and respect for the outdoors, but it also taught me how to survive in the woods. I never worry about getting lost or stranded with no way out; scouting taught me to find my way in the woods day or night.

Besides a pocketknife, a scout's most essential tool is a compass. A compass tells him which direction he is heading in. A map is no good in the woods without a compass to orient it. Knowing how to use a compass is vital to finding your way in the woods because even with a map, unless you know what direction you are going, you are certain to get lost in the labyrinth of trees. The same is true with life.

Sacred scriptures and spiritual books are maps to a better life, but if you have no moral compass or don't use it, you are sure to get lost in the jungles of moral deprivation. Having a holy book in your hand without a moral compass to orient you is no different than being in the woods with a map and no compass.

This is the dilemma so many of us find ourselves in when embarking on a religious path. Too many of us cultivate our knowledge of scriptures without learning to use our moral compass. The result is a lost person with the knowledge of the Bible, Koran, or any other sacred book. And even with the book in hand, we just get more lost as we journey through life. A commitment to learning scripture is good, but we must also line up with and learn to follow our moral compasses.

Your moral compass is your sense of right and wrong, what some call the conscience, inner voice, or spirit. It is what allows us to know right from wrong. For most of us, it points us in the right direction, even when we are traveling in the wrong direction. For example, a man who is about to steal a car may know deep down inside what he is about to do is morally wrong. Yet, despite this knowledge, he does it anyway. His moral compass points him in the right direction, but he chooses not to follow it.

Sacred scriptures, like maps, can tell us where we're at in life, as well as where we need to be, but it is our moral compasses — conscience, spirit or whatever you want to call it — that orients the direction we travel. Until we learn to follow this compass, knowledge of books won't help us much. When we find ourselves in trouble, it's not because we weren't reading our Bibles; it's because we weren't following the right direction our moral compasses pointed us towards. Knowing that stealing is wrong and doing it anyway is like knowing you're supposed to go north, seeing your compass pointing north, and going south instead. If you wound up in the wrong place, it's because you chose not to follow your compass.

Not long ago, I had met a man here who had become very religious. He was the leader — what some call a jailhouse preacher — of a prayer group of about fifteen inmates. They called him "Rev." He carried his Bible everywhere he went, and never spoke a sentence without augmenting it with a quote or two from the Bible. I saw him every day preaching to his little congregation. His zeal for the Christian faith was second to none. He often testified, "Now that I have the Word in me, I can not go wrong again." One day they released him. He gave away all he had accumulated in jail to his Christian brothers, but kept his Bible, saying it alone would keep him out of trouble.

About two weeks later, I spotted Rev on the rec yard detached and obviously depressed. I went over to him and shook his hand. We talked a while before I finally asked him why he was back in jail so soon. He said he had a new case. The police busted him with crack cocaine in a drug-infested area. He was back for selling drugs. He said he knew he was heading wrong, but still decided to go back to selling drugs. Rev went on to tell me the reason for his downfall was he had stopped studying his Bible. He assured me this time he would not lay his Bible down.

Rev has read the Bible from cover to cover many times during his frequent jail stays, and knows it like the back of his hand. His downfall was not because he laid his Bible down; it is because he chose not to follow the direction of his moral compass that indicated drug dealing was not the right path to a better life.

Every religious tradition encourages us to learn to develop and follow our moral compasses. In Christianity, it is called living by the Spirit. In Islam, it's following the will of Allah. In Buddhism, it is taking in the Middle Path. In Hinduism, it is the Dharma.

Some believe we were born with the sense of right or wrong, and innate sacred distinction between us and other creatures. I believe this is only partly true. Our moral or higher conscience is the part of us that makes us like God. It is believed to be a divine nature that marks us creatures made in His image. We are born with it, but it must be cultivated properly for it to point us in the right direction. This is why all religious exhort us to develop a child's sense of moral accountability early. The Bible teaches that we should train children morally so that as they mature, they won't depart from the right path in life.

Many of us have had so little moral conditioning that our moral compasses are defective. When a child grows up in a deprived environment where violence, drugs, promiscuity, pimping and prostitution are not only normal but also honored, he develops into a defective moral agent. He may feel no remorse for killing a person because that person owes him money. A girl who grows up in an atmosphere where a nice body and sex is used to get women what they want, will not consider exposing her body or having sex for money to be wrong. Remember what the stripper told Lisa Rae in "the Players Club" — "Girl, you got to use what you've got to get what you need."

When a child grows up believing right is wrong and wrong is right, his chances of making sound moral choices are diminished. His moral compass pulls in the wrong direction. Prisons and jails are full of men and women with dysfunctional moral compasses.

While I was earning my Wilderness Survival Merit Badge, my scoutmaster warned me that my compass can get demagnetized and become defective, or I may find myself without a compass. He taught me how to use the things around me to orient myself. For instance, the sun always rises on the east and sets on the west. During winter months, moss only grows on the side of the tree that faces south. He also taught me how to locate and follow the North Star. With this knowledge, even without a functioning compass, I can find my way through the woods. The point is that no matter how we grew up, if we pay attention, there are enough things around us to help us determine if the way we are living is good or bad.

I used to be very promiscuous. I grew up around men who believed that having sex with as many women as you could was both a good thing and the greatest symbol of your manhood. Pregnant women, to them, were just evidence of their sexual potency and desirability as men. So I grew up believing that there was nothing wrong with a loose sex life nor with being unfaithful in relationships. Guys who were not fast and who were faithful to their lovers were considered hen-pecked chumps or suckers. What's more, I seldom practiced safe sex!

As I got older, I began to see the results of this lifestyle in others. Many of the men I admired most for their numerous sexual exploits were in and out of jail behind child support. Those unfaithful men who were married to beautiful, loving wives found themselves in divorce court, losing not only their women but their possessions as well. As some got older, they were reduced to the services of prostitutes. And many had contracted HIV and other diseases. This was the direction I was heading in — and I wasn't foolish enough to believe that these things could not happen to me if I didn't change directions. My moral compass was not pointed in the right direction, but observing the things around me helped me to begin making better choices in my sex life. I wanted to be a man, but promiscuity was not the route there. That lifestyle has reduced so many men to nothing.

Today I know that my manhood is not defined by how many women I have had sex with, or how many children I can sire, and I've developed a sounder moral conscience sexually.

Life is a jungle and finding our way can be difficult. Making it through this jungle without getting lost requires our learning to develop and follow our moral compasses. I haven't always followed mine. As a result, I've often found myself in situations and places I didn't want to be in. Though I find much wisdom reading sacred books that can help me determine the best way to live, I've realized that until I start following my moral compass, my knowledge of scripture alone is not enough to lead me to a better life. I must make better choices.

Because I am now learning to follow my moral conscience more, I've been taking more steps in the right direction than I did in the past. I meditate often to quieten my mind so I can learn to distinguish that small still voice of the Spirit. Before I act impulsively, I think about the possible results my actions may bring and where I could end up. I am slowly developing into a more conscientious person.

We're never too lost to change our directions and find our way to a better life. Use scripture as a map, but learn to use your moral compass.

Dark Warriors

I.
Men of color, flat noses, kinky hair
Thick lips — your Blackness is everywhere
In every shade of color and in size
Limitless varieties, skin of prize
Blessed by the Almighty, kissed by the sun
Endowed with wisdom, Nature's favorite son
Created first in order, out of love
Feet treading ground, spirits soaring above
Father of all races, brother to all
First to take a stand, first to take the Fall

II.
Masters and rulers once of a great land
Builders of structures none can understand
Founders of governments, living in peace
Where human dignity could never cease
Kings, priests, prophets, preachers you were
Wisdom of the sages, the world's Teacher
Of science, medicine, philosophy,
Algebra, Chemistry, Astronomy
A society of enlightened men
This is your heritage, what you were then

III.
You, the world's warriors, both dark and brave
Stolen, deprived, and forced to be a slave
Bent but not broken — a warrior's drive
The pride of his heart, the will to survive
Present in his blood, passed on to others
Sharing the hope that makes us all brothers
It is a war, a warrior's battle
To be counted a man, not as chattel
To preserve dignity, you still must fight
The forces of hate, the darkness of night

IV.
You are dark warriors deep in your hearts
No matter your roles, no matter your parts:
Winos, drug addicts, your own personal hells
Convicts, exiled brothers, living in cells
Unemployed, homeless economic bums
Project housing, capitalism's slums
Day laborers trying to make ends meet
Shelters, soup kitchens, places to sleep and eat
Panhandler, con artist, hustler, and thief —
Anything to find some kind of relief

V.
Drug dealers, gang members to tell the truth
Are dark warriors still in their youth
Young gladiators, bangers, juveniles
The new recruits that make our rank and files
Products of the streets, hardened by crime
Molded by hardships, men before their time
Snatched from their youth, they're never the same
Destroying Black boys is the White man's game
An endangered species, a constant prey
Young Black men must find a better way

VI.
Unfaithful husbands and abusive men
Chasing and beating women — a great sin
Deadbeat fathers who only drop their seed
Leaving their children to grow up in need
Rapist, perverts, molesters are to blame
Why so many of us grow up in shame
Jackleg and false preachers are all insane
Preaching and teaching the Lord's Word in vain
But even they whose lives have gone astray
Are the warriors I summon today

VII.
The list goes on and there are still others
Whose lives are different from those brothers:
Carpenters, mailmen, teachers galore
Policemen, firemen, our coaches and more
Doctors, lawyers, judges, to name a few
Brothas who've seen life from a different view
No matter the view we must not lose sight
That all men are part of the fight

PAUL JAY REED (CONT.)

To reclaim a glory, not just ours
We struggle together with all our powers

VIII.
Not just homeless, poor, livin' in a ditch
There are the bourgeois brothas and the rich
Athletes, actors, singers, and writers
Comedians, publishers, and fighters
Millionaire brothas who have broken the mold
Economic casting from the days of old
These brothas have their share and then some
Dangerous to forget where we've come from
No amount of money can change the fact
We have survived despite being Black

IX.
Black men everywhere, I issue this call
To enlist, re-enlist, a draft of all
Conscientious, strong-willed bros
The good, the bad, the hopeless, even those
Who're locked up, on probation, parole
Willing to take up the warrior's role
It's in our blood, to live for glory
The warrior's tale — the greatest story
Honor through courage is yours to gain
A true warrior's fight is not in vain.

X.
Let's rediscover our past so we can
Know what it means to be a true Black man
Let us become men of integrity
We were born to be men of honesty
A true warrior nurtures and provides
The substance to build strong family ties
His code of ethics places him above
Those who hate with an unquenchable love
Let the unvanquished Spirit flow through you
And in the end "To thine own self be true"

He Stood At The Gate

He stood at the gate a free man,
Free for the first time in ten years,
Starting life all over again.
His feet wouldn't budge, but his mind ran,
Knowing he had to face his worst fears.

For him there was nothing and no one;
No job, no home, not a single friend.
To leave his cell was to abandon
All he knew, all he'd ever done.
It seemed the beginning of the end.
Who would call 'rack up' and 'chow time'?
Who would provide him with his next meals,
Being penniless without a dime?
But the world doesn't know how he feels.

Yet he stood there, thinking, at the gate,
Not knowing which way to turn.
Ten years had taught him to wait.
He was free — this was now his fate —
Free indeed, never to return!

Epigram To The Jailhouse Preacher
Sure you read your Bible daily
You preach, teach, shout, sing so gaily.
You claim your deliverance from Hell,
Why can't you keep your ass out of jail?

Epigram To The Fallen
While standing on the edge, I felt a push.
As I fell, looking up, I saw George Bush.
Falling, I yelled back, "What's this all about?"
He said, "Don't you know — three strikes, you're out!"

MICHAEL MCKINNEY

Here's somebody who was meant to connect with us some time ago, but because of unplanned reasons couldn't contact us. Michael McKinney, who writes to us from Florida State Prison, is being featured in our publication for the first time. We published his letter along with his pieces because his desire to participate in our workshops in very inspirational. Day in and day out we come across people who seem to take The Beat for granted, so it's always nice to hear ego stroking statements. And though we can't involve in the actual workshop physically, Michael, we can correspond with you and publish your pieces. So in essence, you will be a part of the workshops, just in a more indirect way. By the way and for future reference, the address to The Beat is on the second page underneath the staff listings. Keep in touch...

I Can Feel Your Pain

I can feel your pain,
'Cause I know what it feels like
When you are hurting on the inside,
With nowhere to turn,
I can feel your pain showing every bit of my concern.
I can feel your pain cause I done been there before,
I can feel your pain
Because my own pain has helped me grow.
I can feel your pain when it is hurting like hell.
I can feel your pain when it is time to rebel.
I can feel your pain
When you are down on your knees praying to God.
I can feel your pain when you are in need for an answer,
I can feel your pain when your life is at ransom.
I can feel your pain when you are alone,
I can feel your pain when you are in need of a home.
I can feel your pain all through your bones.
I can feel your pain just like I feel my own.
I can feel your pain when you're acting hard,
I can feel your pain even when you are not acting smart.
I can feel your pain right down in the bottom of my heart.
And I know that pain is something that hurts
And from these pains
We must learn how not to live in the dirt.
I can feel your pain
'Cause my life has been brought up in a pain of struggles
I can feel your pain like feeling for my brother.
Can feel your pain like reaching out my hand,
I can feel your pain when it is time to take a stand.

Enduring The Struggle

Times get hard but you must be a man,
In the struggle pain is something you must endure
And be able to stand.
'Cause if you fix your heart
And mind to the point where you can take it
Then you will always be able to make it.
'Cause where there is no pain there will be no gain.
'Cause enduring the struggle is what life is all about,
So in the struggle you must not give out,
Enduring the struggle, may seem at times so hard to do,
But it would be something that is left up to you.
Enduring the struggle
Even when you are feeling down and out,
But keep on striving is what the struggle is all about.
Even if some time enduring the struggle
Makes you want to shout.
But keeping your head up is what it must be about.
'Cause the struggle have been going on way before our time But it ain't
that many come from under struggling
Unbittered and with a peace of mind,
Which for most is hard to find,
But it can be achieved if you have a strong heart and mind. And stop living
in the blind.
And enduring the struggle is one of a kind.
And speaking about enduring the struggle,
There have been many other leaders
Who come from the pass of all races and color
Who has stood up through the worst tests of times
And endured the struggle
With a very strong and humble mind.
And when enduring the struggle
And you feel the need to quit,
That's the time to push yourself with every bit
Of power you may have within you,
So you could keep enduring the struggle like no other.
And while in the middle of the struggle
That we must endure,
Never think once about a way to surrender.
And while enduring
The struggle cannot take you off your feet.
And I know for a fact that prison life is not all fun and games But we must
keep enduring these times
Unto we come to love the pain.

Dear The Beat Within

Well, first of all, let me tell you who I am. My name is Michael McKinney, #100414 a prisoner who is housed in Florida State Prison, which I have been housed at this one prison for the last fourteen years, and before I had sent a letter to your publication, back in the beginning of the year of 2005 and like six months later, I had got a letter from your publication along with a free copy of The Beat Within newsletter.

In July of last year and in that letter you had written to me, you went on to explain the situation with The Beat Within, and in that same letter you was asking me to write back to your publication and tell you a lot more about myself. And my intention was to do just that, but something happen, and I no longer had the letter on The Beat Within you had sent to me, and so I was at a loss as to knowing what The Beat Within address was, 'cause I didn't know it by heart. I wanted to get back with your publication so bad but I had no way of doing so.

So as you can see it took me awhile to track your address back down. So I am not wasting any time by getting back in contact with your workshop. And I would love to become a participant with The Beat Within workshop as a writer from the inside. And right now I am involved in some creative writing on my own. And some day I hope to become a good enough writer to write many life changing books to the troubled youth of the world. So they don't have to walk in the same footsteps I have walked in for so many years. And I am studying and working on my spelling and grammar. And for a struggling writer, it is not so bad, plus I am getting a well-rounded education. And I am not a big time writer or anything like that. But I do wish to make my voice known from the inside through my writing. And I think your workshop would be just the place to help me do that. And I would like to try to send a piece or a few pieces of my writing to the Beat Within workshop every week or however I can to be published in The Beat Within newsletter. And along with this letter, I am sending two pieces of my writing to The Beat Within workshop, to be published in The Beat Within. The names of the writings are 'Enduring The Struggle' and 'I Can Feel Your Pain' and they are something I threw together. I have other writing that I have already done. And I have never before had any of my writing published before. So this would be something new to me. But it would also be something I would love to do.

And here is a little about myself. My name is Michael McKinney. I am thirty five years old, born in Attalla, Alabama, raised up in Tampa, Florida. And for over the last seventeen years I have been incarcerated in the Florida Prison System. And I am serving two natural life sentences with a number of years. I am a Cherokee Indian mixed with African American and I have been housed at Florida State Prison for almost fourteen years and for the last ten years I have been in lockdown, in a one man cell, 24 hours a day and is handcuffed even to be taken to the shower three times a week. And I try to maintain and make the best of my lock up time. 'Cause so many years of life have been spent in little one man cells that ain't no bigger than some bathrooms. But I have grown somewhat a lot from this tiny lil' cell I live in day after day. And in this cell I have come to learn that mindfulness is the essence of patience.

I see what's going on and accept it. And I want you to know when I say accept, this does not mean I approve of it. And yes I would like to become a subscriber and have a regularly membership with the Beat Within workshop. And sorry I don't have any funds to pay for a subscription of The Beat Within. But I would like to be able to receive them each week. Thank you and your whole workshop for all your help.

Dear Beat Within

To start this off, I hope when you get this letter it finds you all in the very best of health and spirits and everything is going good for you out there. I read about the contest "Turning Back the Hands of Time" and I'm going to send in a paper for that. I need to think about what to write and I'll start working on it next week. I'm sending with this letter a paper I wrote about my life inside and how I came to find out that it's not cool. I just think it's a little something for young readers to check out and hopefully it will open their eyes so when they get out of the halls they'll think a little more before they do wrong again. Thank you for your time.

BENJAMIN SEDENO

With this brief introduction to

who he is and how he got where he is, Benjamin Sedenjo joins our growing family of Beat Without writers. The story he tells — beginning with that "I don't give a damn" attitude, followed by repeated trips to juvenile halls, then CYA, and finally state prison — is depressingly familiar to anyone who reads *The Beat*. But as he makes clear, he is determined that his story will have a happy ending. It is Benjamin's hope, and ours, that stories like his will inspire some young person traveling down the same dark road to think again and redirect his or her steps without having to experience the brutal reality of prison — such as Pelican Bay State Prison where Benjamin temporarily resides and writes.

My Life On The Inside

I would like to start this off by saying I feel for all the youngsters who are locked up in the halls, camp, and CYA. I have been through all that in my life. I started at the young age of 11 and went from there. At first it was just a few days at a time for fighting. Then as I got older I started breaking into houses to see what I could come up on so I could pay for the drugs I wanted and needed, you know, some weed or some speed. Whatever was the easiest to get at the time.

When I was 14 I got caught for stealing a gun and they put me on probation. You know, when I was that young I didn't give a damn. I just wanted my homies to know I was down. Nothing else mattered to me. I think I went to the halls 25 times before they finally shot me to camp, but I was only there for five months before they kicked me out for stabbing someone with a pencil.

After that I went to another placement. That is when I seen my chance and just ran. They caught me though, like three months later, and when I got back to the hall the staff told me if I don't kick it they are going to send me to YA. I just told them I don't give a damn. They gave me another chance and sent me to a placement in Stockton. I only stayed there for three weeks, then I ran again.

I got caught four months later in Los Angeles with some rocks. I lied about who and how old I was so they put me in county jail. I was only 16, in the worst county jail in California. But I made it. I got out three weeks later and I thought I was the baddest vato alive. They finally got me on November 27 of 1998. I was still 16 so they didn't give me any more chances

and sent me to CYA. There was no more running. I just had to do the time. I stayed fighting though. They always kept me in lockdown.

I did 15 months before the old dope case caught up with me and they sent me back to Los Angeles. When I was there, I got caught up again for a stabbing. By this time I was 17 and they got me for attempted murder and charged me as an adult. Now I'm looking at life instead of the four years I had left to do. I still don't care though because I'm still trying to show everyone that I'm loco, the baddest vato who you don't want to mess with. So now I'm going to prison with real killers and the hardest and baddest vatos there are.

Well, they sent me up here to Pelican Bay, one of the worst places there is for the worst of us in prison. I see the worst happen up in here and now that I think about it, I wish I would have listened when everyone used to tell me to slow down because if I wouldn't, I'd end up in prison one day. It's not that I don't care any more because I do care and I want to get out one day. I have two years left and I plan to get out and make a life for myself so I don't end up in here for the rest of my life because life on the inside isn't cool. It's the roughest thing someone can go through.

So the next time one of you youngsters thinks about trying to prove yourself to your homies, just think about these words and say to yourself, "Do I want to end up doing all that time like that vato I read about?" I'm not trying to tell anyone what to do or how to be. I just want to share my life on the inside.

STEVE JAKUL

We know almost nothing about Steve Jakul, who submitted the following short poem — short in words, but long in meaning. All we can tell you is that this man, who calls himself Stoney, has gone through the fires of hell and come out like a fine piece of pottery from the kiln. We look forward to more from this first-time Beat contributor. Stoney writes us from the Sierra Conservation Center in Jamestown.

I think I went to the
halls 25 times before
they finally shot me to
camp, but I was only
there for five months
before they kicked
me out

Dear Beat

I'm writing because my brother asked me to. Here's how it is. I've spent 15 years in three drug cases in a row. Thank God I get out soon, but a decade and a half has passed by, just like a bird flying by. Here and gone.

I've been through every experience a man can go through, from juvenile hall to the SHU program. Actually, I've even been to the hole in the SHU. It don't get no lower (or higher) than that...

What I've Lost And What I've Gained
I've conquered many fears
And forgot what it's like to cry a tear
I've held on to hope

Then shot it dead with dope
I've had a fine-ass wife and a son
Lost 'em with all the time I've done
I've finally gotten smart enough to set down my guns
Now it's time to learn how to have some really good
clean fun

It ain't too late
There is a thing called fate
She just might be my final date
So I uncaged that rage
And turned the page
Stoney

JEREMY TOWNER

Some of our best writers and thinkers are doing time in Corcoran's SHU. This next writer is one of them, plus a former Santa Cruz Juvenile Hall Beat writer. As you read on, you'll go through several poems, each of them brilliant in their own way. But as you go through them you'll realize that Jeremy truly has a spiritual energy that encompasses your mind with enlightenment and wisdom. For though you can tell he's been through a lot in his lifetime, he shows an outlook that forces us to believe he's been made stronger as a result. We know that takes strength and courage. Keep pushing on Jeremy... as for the rest of you — enjoy...

Fanaticism

Fanaticism is my faith
It is my due to my god
It is my essence
My will
My strength to go on
My love for my life
Lived and would die
If my deeds were false
If my life was a lie
Was it fear?
That brought me hear
Or my conscience shedding tears
Blood on my hands
Am I a man?
I took a life
And yet I still stand
Goodness of heart
Sets us apart
Good and bad
Happy or sad
Christian or another
We all are brothers
If faith you hate
Is a found path too late
Then perhaps a lesson
To show your fate
Do your deeds
Don't live lies
For tomorrow another day
For us all to die
And if we should
We'll learn then
The gods we sought
Were all our friends
So a fanatic with fear
Would be the wrong way to look
For a fanatic has to love
What he once forsook.

A Dream Of Times

A dream of times,
Long gone astray,
A journey on towards,
Dawns on new days,
The spirit of heritage,
And inheritance there lies,
The blood of our kin,
In fields where they died,
On lands forgotten,
With borders that shift,
And their souls to be forever,
As gods one gift,
To a world renowned,
As a place of peace,
And a dream of times,
To live and be free.

How Much Is Too Much

How much struggle must we bear
How much poverty to even care
How much pain and tears
How much anger and fears
How much more war must be waged
How much do we give to those that we gave
How much do we take to say enough
How much more patience before things turn rough
How much more sickness and invented plagues
How much longer will we stand in dread
How much injustice to know it doesn't work
How much law to control the world
How much capitalistic conquest for personal gain
How much more must we be before going insane
How much must we know to do what's right
How much further my God before we see light

Second Chance

This prison really does suck
Inside I cry,
I scream,
I rage.
I think what can be done
They want chance me another life
They branded me a liar
My truth is my only valuable thing
They taunt me
They take my food
How rude
My only substance
They take away
They have become the criminals
Man takes another man's life
It's murder
Homicide
Vicious and cruel
What's the difference
Incarceration is just like taking
They took my life
Kill me already
Why keep me alive
They won't teach me how to be?
No lessons on life?
Where's my second chance
Is it right?
By law it is
By power it is
The leaders lie to the people
A country built on trust
The people don't care
They only act as if they do
No help for me
To set me free
Society to greedy
For capitol gain
I feel the pain
I scream inside
I rage
I hate
If only they would listen
My words are sincere
When I try to speak
They all act deaf
I have changed
Because I have grown
Where's my second chance?

Desert Death

I shuffle tirelessly across the desert
One foot over the other with determination
exhausted...
Thirsty...
Breathless air so hot it scrapes the dried
Out sponges that I use to breath
So much burning...
Stinging...
Flaking...
Cooking...
Slowly being roasted in the desert sun.
Basting in my own juices as I shuffle
So hungry...
Growling...
Salty sweat caked on my face as the hot breeze
wafts a friendly encouragement
Keep moving...
Going...
Don't stop...
Too hot...
If I lay for just a bit maybe sit
My energy will renew a new life
A lie, a lie...
You sit you die...
Keep going...
Gotta try...
Wish I could fly cause I'd be there
I wouldn't care, but I walk,
A trick
I see a trick
I see a stick
No, it's a tree
A tree just for me
Off on the horizon in the vapors of the day
An oasis of rest a mile away
Hope...
Glee...
Let's go see...
The tree just for me,
With shade like lemonade quenching the furnace
heat
So sweat
So salty sweet
So far away
It would take all day to walk that way
What do you say
Insane...
Insanity...
Crazy...
Losing my mind my goose is cooked
Crooked cruel day you've had your way
Frustrated
Hatred
Tired
Exhaustion
Sit for a bit rest your weight
Oh no I can't get up
Too late
This day I hate
This day I die
Fry! Fry!
Why! Oh god why! Walk some more for just a bit
Why! Why did I sit
A trick a trick
Slipping away from the day, as rest for the best
Rest
Sleep
Into the cold dark deep.

JEREMY TOWNER (CONT.)

It's like I'm an addict
That's just about had it
But like the long high
I just gotta have it
And here I am
Sitting in my cell
Wondering how I got myself
Into the twisted hell

Focused Insanity

People like what they like
Even if it ain't right
To get what they want
They'll ask and then fight
Greed is the need
To be relieved
Of the emotions
That are trapped
Struggling to be free
Locked behind bars
With the voices of my mind
Telling me "Don't struggle cause we got plenty of time".
And I hear it
And fear it
Because I know it's my spirit
Trying to show me a life
Because I'm near it
I've reached the end
I'm on my knees
Begging the lord
"Forgive me please"
I've got nothing to my name
And I'm still playing the game
I try to quit
But it's driving me insane
It's like I'm an addict
That's just about had it
But like the long high
I just gotta have it
And here I am
Sitting in my cell
Wondering how I got myself
Into the twisted hell
Day and night
Pacing the floor
While the homicidal neighbor
Is scrapping at the door
He's hatred is focused
By succeeding in his dream
To kill the whole world
While listening to the screams
And all around in lack down
It's nothing but words and spirit
Because all the inmates be talking
That same old twisted shhh
Its insanity at it's finest
These people lost their minds
They lost their grip
With drooling lips
Because they can't do the time
So heed this little tale
Because it rings true
Time snagged me from my life
And the same could happen to you

JEREMY TOWNER (CONT.)

Tests in times
Challenge our minds
The decisions we make
Can always be refined
But it's the knowledge received
That we perceive
To choose different ways
We will carry our feet

Prodigal Existence

My existence
My life
It was an experience to be missed
A lesson for my death
My feet walked the earth
Longing for rebirth
Did I learn?
What did I have?
Possessions?
Money?
Family?
Breath...
But I still breathe
That won't leave
Such a permanent thing
My sin is my end
No more
No mas
The ending
Fin
Did I listen?
Did I hear?
I seek repented redemption
They locked me up
I was only sixteen
A child
A kid
The same as a teen
For life I stay
Locked away
No reformation
No more life
Separated from youth
My family
My society
My country
The towns
The activities
Luxuries
Never learned to drive
Or been in a bar
Had a wife
Or a good job
Or my own place
Never finished ninth grade
Did I learn from what I lost
What cost?
I had nothing but life and death
Oh yeah and breath
How could I learn if I wasn't taught?
Explain that to me
You're still free.

The Only Place I Want To Be

All the while I traveled the earth
Step by step since my very birth
I search for a place to lay my head
To rest my worries upon a bed
A man who knew his wisdom said
Your journey begins step after step
And the miles go on
The travel seems long
But your final destination
Is what keeps you strong
To finish what began
To see the end
Whether you're traveling alone
Or with a friend
Tests in times
Challenge our minds
The decisions we make
Can always be refined
But it's the knowledge received
That we perceive
To choose different ways
We will carry our feet
And all along the world I've seen
And the only place I want to be
Were my feet can rest
And my soul set free
In the embrace of God
And his glory that be
My worries are worn
For all is for a cause
Life to give death to live
Because life is not a pause
His heaven is waiting
His patience is eternal
The place I search for
As I travel this world

Never learned to drive
Or been in a bar
Had a wife
Or a good job
Or my own place
Never finished ninth grade
Did I learn from what I lost

Good Day To The Beat

Jeremy Towner (The con-flicted convict) writing you again. I had to take a break because I needed to find myself again. While during my break I talked to another inmate (Priest) about religion and he seems to think that religion like Christianity is for fanatics. And so like any religious man I defended my faith with my own wisdom. This poem is for those who half step with doubt. Doubt is like parents. When you're a kid, and want to do something, your parents always say no.

Doubt is the enforcer of "I can't" and so opportunities are lost. If you have doubt in faith then you will lose your path to righteousness. Doubt is "no".

My other poem is about spiritual death and the longing for relief in the horizon. We all long and look for our divinities source to life but time and experience can teach us if only we look and listen. I mean we are all at this very moment in a place of existence and the question is always "why". The answer is... well, that's for you to find if you can handle it.

But you have to obtain from meaningless things. Things that destroy your body in time. And most of all our lusts must be controlled before it drives us into desperation and chaotic decisions we always regret later down the time line.

HR 4437

It's interesting to see how many of today's youth have been taking part in the public demonstrations protesting the proposed bill HR 4437, and other matters that discriminate against the youth and employment (as in France), nationality, or faith, and so on. The difference between the demonstrations here and those in Europe, South America, and other places, is that, with the exception of minor skirmishes the demonstrations have been non-violent. Peaceful protests allow people to come together, listen and respect you, and it encourages others to take part in your cause. However, when you are rude and making a violent protests by destroying public and private property — no one will ever hear you out and it discourages others from coming on board.

Mahatma Gandhi through peaceful public demonstrations led the people of India. Such non-violence and passive resistance inspired other leaders in the world to take a stand, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez, each respectively challenged issues they felt were wrong (Civil Rights Movement and the Farm Workers Movement started as a result).

Today, the youth are taking a great stand against, activists against something believed as a wrong: HR 4437. The youth see a wrong in this proposed bill and they have taken action to let the legislature (law makers) know how they feel and to make other aware of the injustices that may take place if this bill passes. It's good to see Latinos taking action across the U.S. and getting involved with political agenda, and there are no looting, vandalism, destruction of private and public property, or blood being shed. How about school? Do they think it's worth the cause (does the end justify the means)? Ever hear that two wrongs doesn't make it right?

The youth that are missing school, ditching and walking out, for these public protests will be tomorrow's leaders and the voice of society. Some may believe that missing school once or twice may be okay for the cause, even if it means getting suspended. Every action has a reaction. Once you get a ball moving — you don't know when it'll stop, and it may run you over. Some of those that participated may have not thought of the consequences, as many of us never planned to get busted or be in jail so many years later.

Ghandi, Chavez, and King Jr. would of never asked anyone to miss out on their education or responsibilities to come to the march. In fact, I believe wholeheartedly that they would of asked for the youth to stay in school. They empowered people to do what was right and obey the laws, as long as it didn't force you to do something harmful or, as in the Civil Rights, allow you to be stepped on. However, they encouraged people to be peaceful and aim for the sky. They knew that people needed inspiration and to be encouraged, and they knew that there was a time and place for everything.

This is the time and place for me to write, for others to read, near and far, and a time and place for public protest/demonstrations. Why weren't the marches after school or on the weekends only? Why during school hours? Some of the youth didn't know what the march

RAPHAEL CABRERA

This next writer, who's writing from Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA, touches the topic of protesting effectively this week. And though we know many people off the top of our head that may disagree with his beliefs, we can tell he has a good argument. We guess 'to each its own'. What may be appropriate to one, may not be appropriate to another. But then again, that's the beauty of The Beat. Our diverse ideas and beliefs, when brought together in this capacity, can move mountains. So let us continue to do so one pebble at a time.

was about and some just wanted to ditch/cut class. But the one's with an understanding and aware of HR 4437 could have taken the stand of where and when, time and place. Remember I said actions have consequences? During these demonstrations some people couldn't get to work on time, deliveries couldn't be made, some people closed their businesses out of fear and expecting riots and looting, and extra police had to be called to work overtime costing more to under budgeted communities. Did anyone think of the possibility that people may have died as a result?

Here's the demonstration with thousands from various schools. All on the streets a man has a heart attack, a house is on fire 'with kids in it', an accident between three cars and there are people 'trapped' in one of the cars. How can these people be saved if, let us say the demonstration (public protest) is blocking the route, the closest and fastest way, to get to the man with the heart attack or one of the others in need of immediate emergency and medical care and response. Anyone of those cases could be one/more of our loved ones. In matters as such, time is of the essence. Do you think that the end still justify the means? Remember, when you take an action there's a reaction and it may not only affect you, but others too.

Some of the youth that cut school may have even harmed their chances of getting a grant/scholarship, if it's in their file — especially! No one likes people going to their school that's a rebel riser. The point is: they hurt themselves and in the end a lot of others too. They have to get their priorities straight — it's all about responsibility. School's a priority that will be needed. It is the key to the future! It will be needed. I don't wish for these youth, you, or any of them to miss school and end up flipping burgers all of their lives, or pushing a broom, or worse yet, be in prison 24 ears since they were a teenager and studying sociology personal and community health, and British literature trying to catch up to an education.

Yes, that's me, in the joint and my parents were migrants, not in the fields, but nonetheless with the same dreams and hopes they have for their children: to go to school, get an education and a career/employment where they could afford and support their own family, as well as live happily ever after. They didn't wish for me to come to prison or for me to do the things I did. In the same respect, you can make a difference. No matter how bleak, you can still help someone. You have to do what is right and go on with positive words encouraging others, as other leaders (Chavez, Ghandi, and King Jr.), and maintain peace.

CHARLIE HUSTLE

This first time writer from Solano State Prison in Vacaville, CA, wraps a gift to give the love of his life. And as we unwrap it, we realize that the person he speaks of is real solid. It sounds like she's a keeper. Hopefully, 'Dorkus' sees this, for if not, she's missing out on a great tribute to herself.

We have shared each others burdens-grown stronger, side-by-side. We have built a life-long oneness that nothing or no one can divide. We have hoped when things seemed hopeless, we have stood on faith alone. Our love will never fail us with God, our cornerstone.

Dorkus

I am 24 years old and feeling the pain of losing someone. I am a second time reader of your publication and a first time writer. I do appreciate getting it every week, but do I got to write weekly to get it? Don't get much mail in here. I have been going through my own turmoil in this we call life. I miss my "Dorkus" badly (Dorkus is the love of my life). Here is something I wrote for her and all your readers:

Dorkus, because of you, I know the true joy that comes from feeling closer to someone than I've ever felt before. I know the comfort of friendship and the passion of wanting to share everything I have with you and Kristian. I know that I must be one of the luckiest people in this world to have y'all on my side.

We have shared each others burdens-grown stronger, side-by-side. We have built a life long oneness that nothing or no one can divide. We have hoped when things seemed hopeless, we have stood on faith alone. Our love will never fail us with God, our cornerstone. How truly blessed we are to have such a beautiful faith, to share a lasting love. You are the perfect love and the perfect friend. Just let me love you. I love you and thank you for loving me. Don't forget about us. Eternally yours, Charlie Hustle.

It's like I'm an addict
That's just about had it
But like the long high
I just gotta have it
And here I am
Sitting in my cell
Wondering how I got myself
Into the twisted hell

check out the rest of Jeremy Towner's BWO piece on page 89

